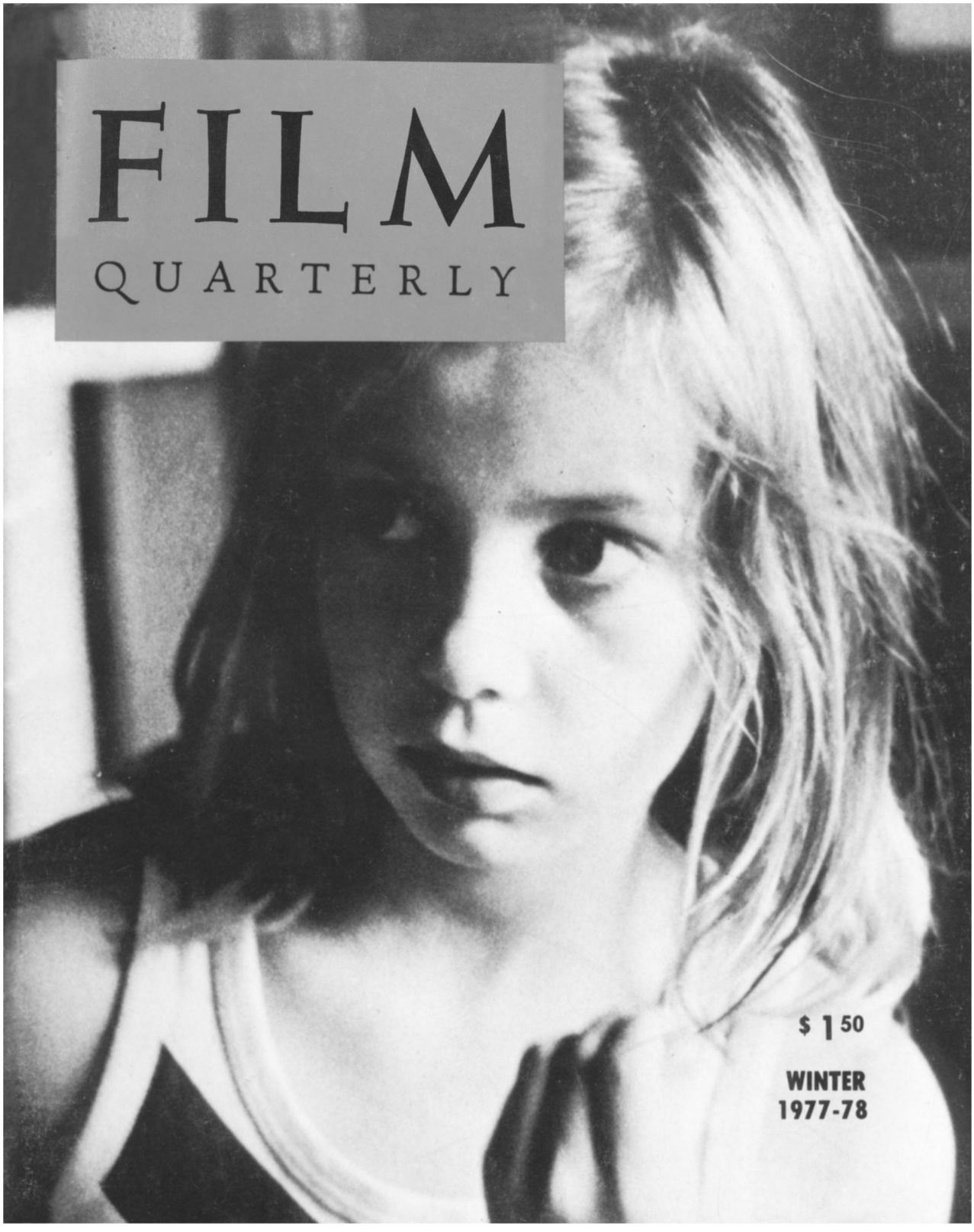
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mer comes down . . . BOOM! You hear a strong sound, so that you get used to this accent. After some time the hammer comes down and when the hammer hits the object you don't hear natural sound anymore, you hear a word, a passionate call.

This brings us to how I did the restoration. I did it without any written or other references. I did it only on the basis that I was a film-maker who understood Vertov's way of composing.

**LF:** On a technical level, how did you proceed?

**PK:** What we began with was a normal positive, composite print with sound from Gosfilmofond's negative in Moscow. We separated it, which means we made an image negative and a sound negative. We also made a sound track on magnetic perforated tape. But then I did not work with the tape. The optical sound permits you also to ***see*** the sound writing and you can see if the original flow of sound signals is maintained or if there has been a cut. You see every cut. Then when I analyzed the sound track I found out how the cuts that Vertov himself had made looked. And then I found out how later restoration cuts looked, or how cuts that projectionists who had ruined the print looked. Which means that the print on which I worked was not made from the original negative; but, apparently, was made from a negative which had been made from a print.

Of course, Gosfilmofond had searched for the best print available but the print had gone through several stages of destruction and restoration—at least one stage of very bad restoration, namely a cosmetic restoration where the people who had restored it had cut away edges of the sound or of the image in order to make it fit.

And there was a restoration phase where black leader had already been put in to make up for missing elements in the image. Anyway, in spite of the black leader, all the places where there were lip sync were out of sync in the old versions. So this was the state in which I found the film. When I started to work with the separated image and sound I only realized how the film was gaining in brilliance and precision and it really changed completely. In the first reel, for example, it was out of sync only by a few frames and you still got, more or less, what was meant. But the ***start*** of the sync was always ruined. But when it's really in sync, it comes "Bang!" and immediately works and that's very different. You remember in the first reel, there are images of bells and then crosses which are faded out, one-two-three. In the restored version you have rhythmic accents on everything and in the other version you did not.

**LF:** How did you correct for the lack of precise synchronization?

**PK:** The working process was that I had the image work print and then the optical sound, and I tried to find the right place and went forward and backward and adjusted it until I found the right place. Again, to defend myself, I do not want people to view this as ***my*** version. What I did was really just to find out how it originally was and I did not cut one single frame, either from the sound or from the image. When the image was too long, I put silent leader in the sound to make it match again. When the sound was too long I put black leader in the image. So nothing is lost. I must point out very strongly that this is not a restoration like those of the 19th century, when they restored paintings by painting things in to make it look like the original. This is not what I did. I did not make a cosmetic restoration. It can be undone anytime and it will be in the state in which I found it.

**LF:** How close to the original do you believe that your restored version comes?

**PK:** There remain some places in the film where I am still not sure if it's in the right sync. And they occur near the Plan sequence. There are some moments which are not up to the level with which I would credit Vertov; and I was not able to find a more convincing relation between sound and image than the one that was there. But I would say that the film is now 90% in synch and there were differences in sync from between two or three frames to more than 300 frames.

You know, Vertov had to change the title of the film from ***Enthusiasm*** to ***Symphony of the Donbas.*** But the real title is ***Enthusiasm.*** This is what he wanted. Now that the film is restored this is what you really feel. You can feel this drive, this enthusiasm. You can feel that and you did not feel that before.

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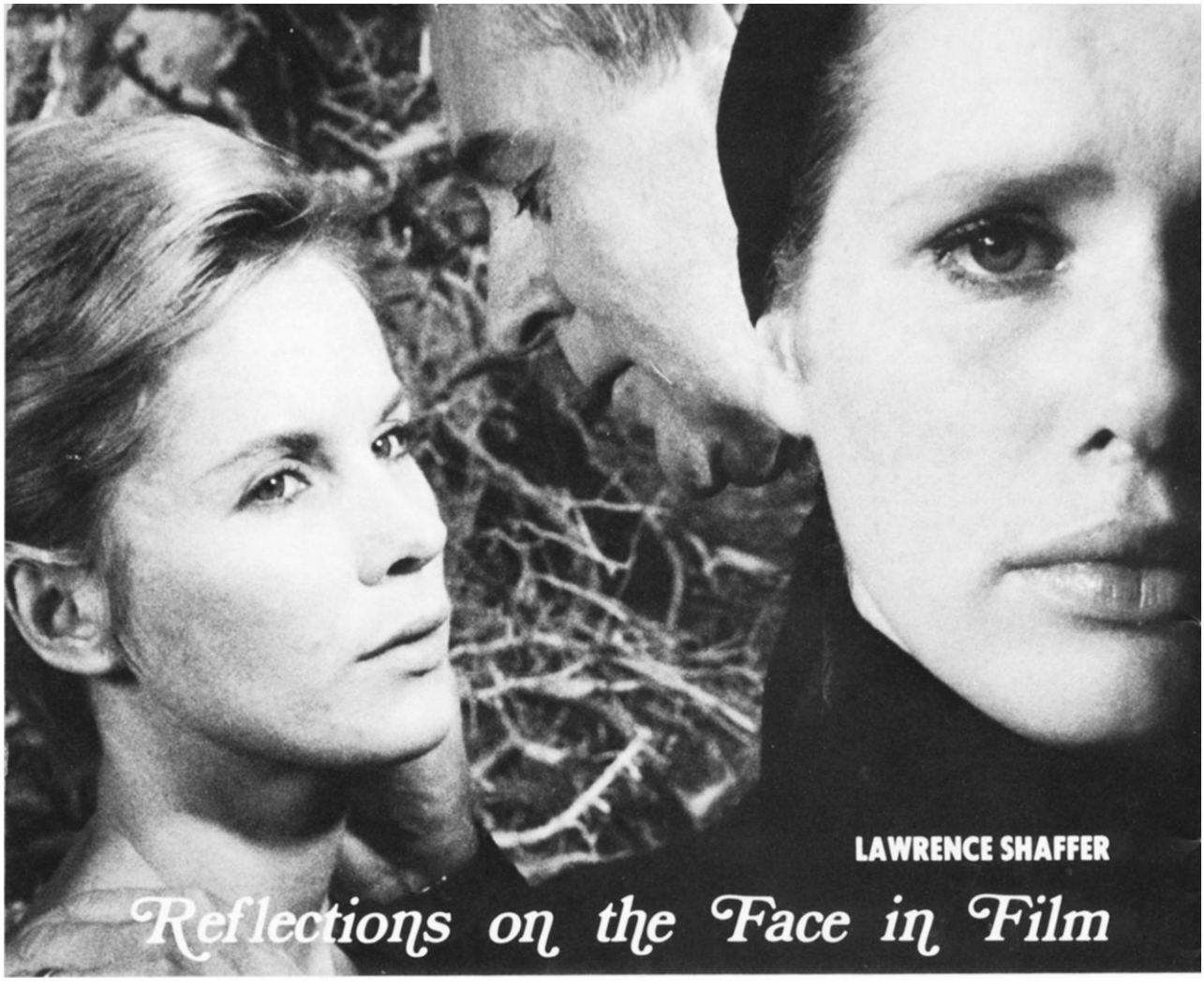
Contributors, continued

MUELLER-SWORORSKI is working on a book on Brecht and communications theory; she lives in Berkeley. BILL NICHOLS is head of the film program at Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, and editor of the anthology *Movies and Methods.* MICHAEL SEITZ teaches at Wilkes College, Wilkes-Barre, Pa. SYBIL THORTON studies film at San Francisco State University, and is writing her thesis on women in Japanese film.




A still of a still. But contrary to Keats's Urn, beauty perhaps but never truth is captured in the stilled crevices of motion. Tying up movement liberates time, time to consider. But whatever it means to *know* a face, a face arrested is not any the more "decipherable." In any event a face is not a code to be cracked, like a fortune cookie.

If *Blow-Up* followed the progress of Redgrave's face, frame by frame (seemless transition by seamless transition), then it would be Hemmings's face, suddenly inserted out of context as if into an amusement park cut-out, that would defy interpretation.

What a face fails to reveal at any snapshot moment is the serial record of its experiences. Except in a topographical sense. Otherwise, it is less a palimpsest than a mirror: so much has been registered only to be lost. A face lacks even the record of its erasures. It is scored by its history without retaining a score of that history. More and more intense scrutiny may reveal more surface details, but such details are not semantic markers to some "deep structure" of mind, character, and sensibility. That they may seem to be is a kind of *trompe l'oeil* triumph of sheer physiognomy, that the latter has "implications" beyond what meets

the eye. Physiognomy can suggest a whole mirage of character, sensibility, experience (think of Jean Gabin, Louis Calherne, Trevor Howard, Tracy and March). A face that looks "lived in" is a face that *seems* to comprise (or reprise) its past in any of its momentary expressions. Fredric March's sensibility did not somehow "in form" his features, osmotically, more than, say, Walter Pidgeon's. And yet that was the illusion. Physiognomy lent Karloff's face an iconic look, signifying a world beyond (or below) this one. Vincent Price, assaying the Karloff roles, can only be parodic because he must mug to try to reach the place from which Karloff effortlessly begins. Of course there was nothing *known,* nothing to be discovered behind Karloff's mad scientist brow. Surface, then, as a blind alley. The limits of perception. Nothing to choose between lunar close-ups and the man in the moon.

The childlike faith of science—that the more closely a thing is examined the more it will reveal—is matched in film by the close-up. Bergman makes a virtue of his vice in *Persona,* where close-ups of a voluntarily mute Liv Ullmann fail to reveal what makes her not tick, while close-ups of a totally expressive Bibi Anderson conversely demonstrate that if a face can express everything its owner feels, then whatever it is in human thought and feeling that is inexpressible has not been sufficiently nourished. In *Blow-Up,* Antonioni puns upon the pointillist limitation of photography, a limitation, that is, on what it can represent. If photography tries to penetrate appearances to reach some supposed truth behind them, the result is reductionism: representation is broken down into its abstract constituents. The skeptical epistemology of *Blow-Up* asserts that although the dots of progressively enlarged photos of faces are identical with those faces, *identity* (identification) actually recedes the "closer up" we get. Yet the face exerts an almost gravitational pull for filmmakers, for of all surfaces the face seems to promise most (because it is the most expressive) some revelatory truth behind it. But the camera does not necessarily get any closer to states of mind by getting closer to the face. And on the other side of the facial coin lies the notion of face-as-mask, concealing or misleading. But just as the face can reveal only so much, so can it mask only so much. And as for subjective truth—what it's *like* "back there" or "behind"—the face in film, as in life, provides not the least inkling. The so-called subjective states it expresses can only be objective expressions for the viewer. Just as the suggested depth of the screen is illusory, so is that of the face. There is no interior we can penetrate to see what it's like from. No nether side.

Hemmings stares at Redgrave's photo, Redgrave stares back at Hemmings though in a different time frame. Such face-offs are the dilemma of the surface character of visual experience, the dilemma of a world, staring us in the face, that seems to signify so much behind it. But however we scrutinize it, we discover as little as the child who searches behind the screen for the "real" source of the images on the screen. What promises to be the transparency of the visible delivers as the inscrutability of the visible.

*Nevertheless,* the common complaint against film vis-à-vis the novel, that it is limited to the objectivity of visual surfaces, is only partly justified. It is true that what "knowledge" a piece of film can express is restricted to its surface and that although a surface can transcend itself by *representing* something other than itself, what this still means, in the case of film, is that film is limited to what the face can show. But since the face reflects thoughts and feelings, it is not just a surface but a reflecting surface, more communicative than the surface of a wall no matter how "expressive" the wall might be. And more signicative also than a lake or mirror, which mindlessly reflect what they are forced to by circumstance, i.e.,

*Left:* PERSONA. *Right:* BLOW-UP.

other surfaces passing within their "view." So, faces in film are certainly more epistemologically valuable than the other surfaces on the screen—objects, landscapes, etc.—which can only, dumbly, be themselves. But this is not to claim that much. Nothing like a *key*. The face remains an impenetrable surface for all its "expressiveness."

At the end of *City Lights* the no longer blind heroine touches Chaplin's hand and "recognizes" him as the kind stranger who had befriended her when she was blind. It's a curious recognition scene, consisting not only of a connection but a disconnection, the asymmetry of the face now before her and the idealized image it has just displaced. Chaplin's facial response to the flower girl's (whose own face, now that it is able to look out in addition to being looked at, has taken its place in the reflective/reflexive interplay of normal social intercourse) is a screen-encompassing, transcendent smile that, over the years, has assumed mythic proportions. What does the smile signify? Pride? Sheepishness? To know all is to accept all? What else can one do in the naked face of truth but smile? The problem of signification is insoluble if the smile is interpreted in isolation from the larger segments of character logic that inform it. The context is all. In this respect Chaplin's smile differs from the *Mona Lisa's* (and from Vanessa Redgrave's isolated "look") as indeed the serial character of film differs from the single-frame character of painting. But the problem of facial interpretation is more acute at this moment in *City Lights* than almost anywhere else in film, for not even contextual considerations, not even the viewer's eidetic retention of the entire gamut of Chaplin's facial phenomenology in the film prepares us for that smile. It is difficult to think of a comparable instance where a single expression has so transcended the character's previous range. What Chaplin achieves in that lingering moment as the screen slowly darkens so that we cannot be certain whether the smile is still there or whether its mystery is being sustained by its after-image is a supreme instance of what might be called perspectival non-identity. In that smile Chaplin is and yet isn't the same character we thought we knew, just as he is and isn't the benefactor the heroine thought she knew.

Look at anything intently enough (including the concept of "look") and, as Hemmings learned, it becomes more rather than less mysterious. What is it for Chaplin and the girl to "exchange looks"? The ambiguity of "looks" is that it can be applied to the face either as the object of others' looks or as the subject of one's own looking. Chaplin and the girl exchange looks not by *doing* anything, just by *looking*. When looks are exchanged, X walks away with Y's image and vice versa. But then there's also what X thinks Y's image of X is, which in turn affects X's self-image (and ditto for Y). So any exchange of looks also affects the way one looks at oneself. "Looks," then, gets at the whole subject-object figure/ground of human experience, the face being the border or boundary line of this reversible configuration. In any exchange of looks the face is Janus-faced. The difficulty, then, in "taking the measure" of Chaplin's smile is that it is not only reactive but reflexive. Chaplin's face reflects the once blind heroine's perception of it. Paradoxically, the smile is both outer-directed and

self-referring. This ambivalence is generally true of the face, but few moments in film have walked its tightrope so exquisitely. *Somehow,* Chaplin is smiling both at the girl and at himself. And *that* is the facing-mirrors conundrum that doesn't so much end *City Lights* as transfigure it.

Whatever *The Blue Angel* is "really about" what it *shows* are the different faces of Professor Unrat: smug professorial face vs. degraded vamped face, professorial face vs. clown face, face in the "first person" vs. mirrored face. In its progressive unmasking, the film explores face as mask and mask as face. Masks both conceal and, by their selection, reveal. Unrat's professorial face/mask is replaced by a silly flirtatious one, then by a desperately infatuated one, and ultimately by a clown face through which a damned spirit seems to stare. After each displacement we see both what had been concealed and what had been fabricated. But we cannot feel superior. Professor Unrat, c'est moi. For anyone, is there any such thing as his "natural" look?

The still eye of the hurricane: the scene where in clown's make-up Unrat fixes on his reflection in a tripartite mirror. The mirror inspection is that uniquely reflexive moment in human experience when the face comes upon itself, compelled (let's face it) to adjust self-image to real image. It is the only time the face can get out of itself. In *M,* as a newspaper account of Lorre-as-madman is being narrated, we cut to Lorre inspecting himself in a mirror and seeing himself *as* a madman as he turns down the corners of his mouth, widens his eyes, etc. He is now seeing himself as others imagine him. He was and is mad but now he apperceives himself as "mad," just as Unrat has been degraded but now explicitly sees himself as "degraded." We see both men adjusting to a new recognition of themselves. When Lorre looks at a "Wanted" poster of himself, aghast that that child murderer is himself, we see him trying to catch up with this new image of himself: he contorts his face to conform to the new identification. If he could suddenly come upon himself at that moment he would have some difficulty recognizing himself!

That the face in film is never just a thing-in-itself but always a reflective metaphor has never been more obvious than in *The Blue Angel.* As Unrat assesses himself in the mirror, the reflection is a metaphor for the self-knowledge invading him as he gauges how far he's fallen. It is not his "real"

*Left: Chaplin in the last scene of* CITY LIGHTS. *Right: Emil Jannings in* THE BLUE ANGEL.

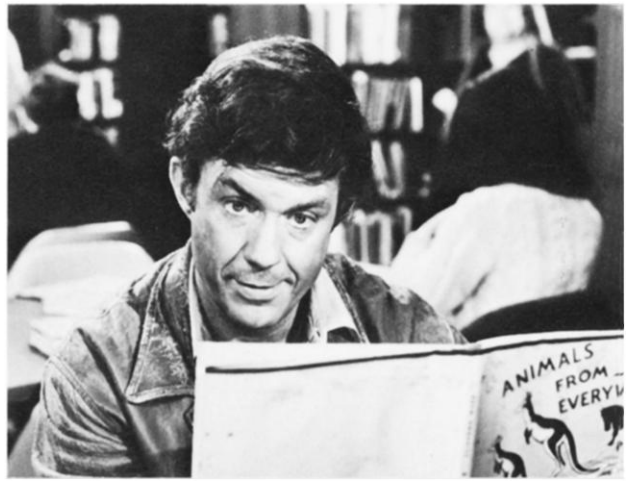
face he sees but a symbolic version of what he's become. We infer his "real" self peering through his eyes, as through a keyhole, at the awful spectacle (compare the eyes of Jean Marais, i.e., of the prince, seemingly penetrating his bestial face/mask in Cocteau's *Beauty and the Beast*). The moment is horrible for *what* is seen but noble for *being* seen.

But films must earn such moments of awesome self-regard. When Jack Nicholson regards himself in a washroom mirror in the final scene of *Five Easy Pieces,* we can't imagine what he's seeing beyond literal duplication. The reflexivity has no metaphoric resonance because Nicholson has not been brought to any new understanding of himself. When he looks into the mirror we have no clue as to what he thinks he's seeing there. The Jannings–Nicholson distinction demonstrates the crucial role of *recognition* the face must play if a film is to become aware of what it's about. Only in the cathartic scene with his paralyzed father does Nicholson break through his mask in self-recognition. One thinks of Redgrave's breakdown in *The Browning Version,* wherein the face of a tyrranical Latin teacher imprisoned in Reichian character armor lets go of itself in convulsive sobbing in response to a student's thoughtfulness. This thaw in what had been a death-in-life mask constitutes the film's awareness of its "point," its self-recognition. A similar epiphany provides *La Strada* with its self-insight when Anthony Quinn collapses sobbing on a beach in recognition of his loneliness without Giulietta Masina. These breakdowns are the films' breakthroughs into self-recognition. Unrat will soon complete his entropic collapse in the famous cock-crowing scene. But before that black hole, that total loss of the integral self, there is the final, noble assessment in the mirror, the saving grace of *knowing,* the only one homo sapiens can count on.

We squirm when an actor puts on his character's face à la Marcel Marceau. We are transfixed when he simply appears to be "economizing" by using his own face in a kind of transmigratory transference. There is no objective method of calibrating such economy, only a subjective impression of double or single vision. In *Charly,* Cliff Robertson puts on what might very well be characteristic expressions of a retarded man, but the expressions still seem appliquéd. In contrast Jack Nicholson's face after he has been lobotomized at the end of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* is transfigured—Nicholson's face has seemingly changed "inside out." The distinction is theoretically elusive but ostensively clear. The theoretical problem hinges on the median position of the face between expression and inner feeling. Although the face is directed outward it reflects inward (reflects mental states). In these terms Robertson's face, as opposed to Nicholson's, was too much outer-directed and too little inner-reflective. The faces of certain actors—Brando, Gielgud, Clift, March, Tracy, Bogart—seem to be acutely inner-reflective. These actors seem to be doing a good deal of thinking. Their faces look preoccupied, as if attending to some inner voice, or memory.

The face, when not self-manipulated, shows what it does not know of itself. The actor who goes to see himself in a film and smiles in wonder at the naturalness of his smile is smiling at as good an actor as the subjects of *Candid Camera* or *cinéma vérité* (if they were actors!). The "organicness" of a facial expression means that the expression does not seem to have been programmed to signal what it is expressing. One criterion of "economic" actor-character identification is the apparent ease and fullness with which the actor's face occupies the fictional face it is impersonating. Curiously, the mechanism for this transference (across no space at all) is in the mind's eye. The actor successfully

*Below: Cliff Roberton in* CHARLY. *Right: Ralph Richardson in* THE HEIRESS.



sees himself as his character, thus defeating the perspectival non-identity of himself and his role.

Robertson's facial play in *Charly* exhibits the difference between how the face looks when the mind seems to be telling it what topology to adopt and how it looks when spontaneously reflecting mental states. In Robertson/Charly's case we have a smart actor's mind telling the face to act as if it's reflecting a foolish mind. When the face is puppeteered, it "falls" in a different way from when, apparently unknown to the mind, it is spontaneously miming its mood. It may be that Robertson is simply asking us to accept his face as a symbolic icon for childishness. We are to ignore, as with the Japanese Bunraku puppet masters, Robertson behind his face, moving it. We are being asked, perhaps, simply to accept the equation of flitting, explicit, "spontaneous" expressions (expressions explicitly offered as *representing* childlike spontaneity) with childlike mentality. But then the problem with our being asked to suspend our belief in the naturalistic is that we bring to film not the stylistic expectations of the Japanese puppet play but the habitual expectations of real life. There, facial expression is seamless with mental states (except in cases of deception or repression, where nevertheless it may *appear* seamless). Failing to come together stereoscopically, Robertson/Charly remain, disastrously, composite.

Next to a still of Ralph Richardson from *The Heiress* imagine one of Ryan O'Neal from *Barry Lyndon.* The difference is the cinematic analogue of the difference between Thackeray and Henry James. Richardson has a cognizant look. You perceive him as "looking out," a *subject* of perception, a Jamesian center of consciousness. O'Neal is merely an *object* of perception. *Barry Lyndon* has a hole at its center. Light comes through but the optic nerve is dead. A film's illumination may not be the exact sum of its characters' illuminations but it is difficult to think of a film that achieves the former without exhibiting the latter. It is somehow unsatisfying that *we* are brought to a recognition of the significance of Rosebud when no one else in the film but Kane is. But at least Kane, in making "Rosebud" his final word (at the *beginning* of the film) extends a thread through the cluttered labyrinth of the film that the *last* shot, of the burning sled, will make luminescent. The more *in*sightfulness (taking place from within), the more cognizant looks in a film *(My Night With Maud),* the more luminous it tends to be. *Barry Lyndon* presents a scenically fulsome world which the characters, like statues in a park, seem unaware they're inhabiting. Instead of characters' sightlines creating their own views within the film, enlightening it from within, there is only a single omniscient perspective, dazzling but inconsequential, from without. Despite the deep focus of *Barry Lyndon's* compositions, the absence of reflective facial imagery makes the film "flat as a picture." Everything is *seen,* but nothing is *known.* Just as faces aren't sheerly surfaces, they aren't sheerly "pictures." They are essentially reflectors, and, as such, have all the *suggested* (and suggestive) depth of mirrors despite their impenetrable flatness. And since, like Cocteau's mirrors, they are not automatic, one-to-one reflectors but "reflective" reflectors, endowing the external world of visual/tactile surface with subjective values of thought and feeling, of attitude, intention, and judgment, they have the potential of lending film the novelistic depth that, as sheer picture show, it otherwise lacks.

Unlike *Barry Lyndon, The Heiress* is animated by criss-crossing perspectives internally generated by the faces within the film, not (apparently) by the camera outside it. Each perspective ultimately arrives at an illuminating if chilling view of itself. The film's triumvirate point-of-view radiates out from the glacially knowing face and X-ray vision of Ralph Richardson, the homely but animated face of Olivia de Haviland, and the determinedly

*"Cognizant looks": Francoise Fabian in* MY NIGHT AT MAUD'S

charming face of Montgomery Clift. Again, it's what these faces seem to be seeing, what they seem to realize or seem not to realize and the transitional states between, that gives the film its conglomerate point-of-view. ("Seem" in that no matter how the camera tries to simulate subjectivity, we are still third-person interpreters of "the other.") Richardson sees Clift's face as a mask for whatever the facial expression of ruthless greed would look like. De Haviland doesn't even possess the notion of a face that instead of routinely expressing the mind "behind" it is manipulated by that mind to conceal its true feelings and intentions. Richardson's and de Haviland's viewpoints are clear. Clift's isn't. Of the three it is his face that earns Duncan's frightening "There's no art to find the mind's construction in the face," frightening because in the distinction between inner and outer, on which the very concept of "expression" depends, lies the entire history of human deceit and pretense. Until the end it is impossible to determine the extent, if any, that Clift's face is a mask rather than a mirror. We search for some hint: a smile turning sour with the effort, a facial slip of any kind. Perhaps the mask has become the face, the actor has begun to believe his role, to take it at face value. (Such actor/character ambiguities are irresolvable because the actor's face is inseparable from the character's that it "embodies," an identity so close that "represents" is too weak a description of it. There is no meta facial language to place the character's face within the perspective—i.e., make it the "object" of—the actor's.

*The Heiress* ends with de Haviland assuming her father's face—knowing at the expense of feeling. She sees that Clift has not been "sincere" (Clift has talked about being "sincere" the way Iago parades "honest"). Her face is now self-possessed because of the certain truth she has gained, not only about Clift but about herself. Dialogue certainly fills in *The Heiress,* but for all its staginess the film's major movements are not mapped out verbally but in the facial stances and facial evolution of the three protagonists.

What the face in film affords, as it does in life, is a vantage point. If the Invisible Man had truly lost his face instead of merely being faceless to others, the world would, conversely, be invisible to him, for visibility depends on a particular vantage point to be visible *from.* The filmgoer never wants to have sacrificed his view of a character's vantage point for the greater kinesthetic verisimilitude of what it subjectively is like to view things from a vantage point. That is, we are never happy with the substitution of camera for protagonist, because it is not *his seeing* that we are able to identify with but *him seeing.* This is what the "cognizant look" affords. Without it a film can have the same "look" a blind person has.

MICHAEL COVINO

# Wim Wenders:
## A Worldwide Homesickness

In *The Goalie's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick* the distracted protagonist, Joseph Bloch, learns the name of the woman he has spent the night with in the course of their morning breakfast. She spells it for him: "G-l-o-r-i-a." Later, after strangling her, he goes to a disco where "Gloria" is played on the jukebox. But this does not register. Phillip, the unhappy, down-and-out journalist of *Alice in the Cities,* finds himself saddled with Alice, a precocious nine-year-old German girl whose mother has abandoned her in New York. Returning to Germany, these two unfortunate strangers travel together trying to locate Alice's grandmother with nothing more to go on than a photograph of her house. In *Wrong Movement* a group of aimless young people come together by chance around Wilhelm (an updated Wilhelm Meister) as this would-be writer crosses Germany from the Baltic to the Alps. And in *Kings of the Road* two young men, a projector repairman who lives in a van and a researcher in child linguistics who has recently left his wife, meet by accident early one morning, and decide to spend the next few weeks together as they travel across the bleak North German Plain. In fact the only thing that doesn't seem accidental, or even silly, in all of this, are the number of fleeting, chance encounters themselves, and it is precisely this sense of anxiety-ridden transience, of fragility, that has marked just about everything Wim Wenders has done.

Wenders's films seem almost frivolous, off-the-cuff, alongside those of his compatriot Fassbinder, whose enormous energy and prolific output, along with his furiously conscious embracing of melodrama and his more obvious political stands, have won him wider critical attention. Wenders has gone the other way, just about eliminating drama altogether (except in *Alice in the Cities*). And alongside Werner Herzog's major films, where the starting points themselves almost always seem to be weighty—a child is locked in a closet for 16 years; an off-shoot group from Pizarro's conquistadors explores the Amazon—Wender's subject matter seems slight: a few days in the life of a disgruntled goalie, a cross-country journey by two young men in a van. But Wenders shapes his trivial stories into something far more

*Dennis Hopper in Wenders's new film,* THE AMERICAN FRIEND.

affecting than what they're ostensibly about. His films are slow, yet not so slow in that purposeful, painful way that Antonioni's and Resnais's films are slow. There is none of that ponderous sense of deliberation that somehow makes you feel that here must be a rewarding experience. No, Wenders includes too many silly little jokes for that. *Alice in the Cities*, for example, opens with a shot of Philip, the German journalist, huddled beneath a boardwalk on an overcast day at a deserted Long Island beach, taking pictures with his Polaroid while singing, in English, "Under the boardwalk/on a blanket with my baby . . ." (As it turns out, he does later find himself on a blanket at a German beach with a nine-year-old girl.) It's a nice, low-keyed opening for the film, an opening we can imagine neither Fassbinder nor Herzog using. It's the sort of child-like silliness that perhaps Salinger might have brought to the screen had he become a film-maker rather than a writer. And so it seems almost accidental that what Wenders's films leave us with finally is simply a mood—a chilling and exacting mood, a sense of things, that somehow corresponds to what our own nerves tell us about the world.

Born in Düsseldorf in 1945, Wenders studied at the Munich Film Academy from 1967-1970 while working as a film critic for *Filmkritic* and *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. He made several experimental films, including the negligible *Summer in the City* in 1970, and then in 1971 he completed his first feature, *The Goalie's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick*, based on the Peter Handke novel, and shot for the most part in the Austrian village where Handke wrote the novel. "I never wanted to show things that are shown in general," Wenders has said in an interview with Tony Rayns. "Even the first film I made at film school had the sense of a missing story. . . ."

◄ ALICE IN THE CITIES

*The Goalie's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick* is, ostensibly, a murder thriller. But the thriller, which we are prepared for early on, simply falls by the wayside. The film is really about anxiety, and through a remarkably simple series of static shots that make us identify with Bloch's passive point of view, alternations of long shots and claustrophobic close-ups that serve to quickly involve and detach us, and an unnerving amplified sound track that shows the influence of Bresson, Wenders manages to induce in us a state of anxiety similar to that of Bloch. The mechanical arm reaching out for the records inside an old jukebox becomes in close-up something menacing. And the sound track, which starts off normally enough, is gradually subjected to increasing distortion—the way a glass is placed upside-down over a beer bottle, the way the cutlery rattles, become positively jarring. All these things do not make it a pleasant or an easy film to watch. Shot in color and for the most part at dusk, the film has a number of strikingly eerie long shots of fluorescent lights of gasoline stations that seem to burn against the twilight skies, and of the rural farmlands where cars, headlights aglow, move almost mysteriously along the back country roads. Dusk, that time of day when light gets slowly choked off from the sky, becomes the visual translation of anxiety. It is this twilight region that Joseph Bloch, soccer goalie, inhabits.

After murdering a movie house cashier in her apartment in a scene that is shot in a deliberately understated way, Bloch carefully wipes his fingerprints off everything he has touched. But the camera notices two American coins, souvenirs of a recent soccer tour, that he missed under the newspapers on her kitchen table. A short while later on a bus when some American coins fall from his pocket, an elderly woman brings them to his attention. And when he pays for a hotel room, he accidentally gives the manager an American

bill. All these mistakes make us sit up straighter, for in the conventions of the thriller they foretell his doom. But it is a doom that never arrives. The framework of the thriller, which was a skeleton for Godard to hang a different story on in *Breathless*, here dissolves into nothing. We are left not with a criminal but with a man quietly going mad. Yet he never goes entirely mad—it is as if his rage has reached such an intensely high level that it has freed him of having to cope with it any longer, and so affords him a curious relief.

And the things that happen to him in the course of several days, although obviously accidental enough, *seem* like a carefully pre-arranged series of outrages. He turns on the TV, only to watch himself bungle a goal in a replay of the afternoon game. His hotel room overlooks the main street, where the last bus passes at midnight. The cashier's apartment overlooks the airport, which the last mail plane takes off from after midnight. He gets beaten up . . . We see all these things in a series of quick, disconnected shots with fade-outs between scenes, with no more emphasis on a shot of Bloch getting beaten up than there is on a shot of an empty village square. The effect of cutting short those scenes that we expect to be significant, and arranging them without any particular emphasis, is to confuse our normal sense of emotional involvement while at the same time intensifying our perceptions of transition shots that would normally pass over us, so that an empty village square can actually set us on edge. Bloch's disconnection, his dread, at once understated and furiously alive, becomes our own.

Many of Wenders's films contain direct homages to John Ford who, with his feel for overwhelming skies and disquieting environments that isolate his characters, has clearly been an influence. But I think it is more properly Bresson, with his precise camera work, who has been a stronger influence. One of the few films I have seen that captures so painfully well this sense of things *always* going awry, always closing in on one, is Bresson's *Mouchette* (1967). Even Wenders's static camera, with the characters moving in and out of the frame, is reminiscent of Bresson.

THE GOALIE'S ANXIETY AT THE PENALTY KICK

In 1972, between the making of *The Goalie's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick* and *Alice in the Cities*, Wenders directed a loose screen adaptation of *The Scarlet Letter*. The wilderness, America, Hawthorne—they're all there. Yet this film, a minor work, perhaps because it does embrace subject matter so apparently foreign to Wenders, reveals itself as distinctly his. It is filled with strange silences between people, silences that become prolonged by startling close-ups of the characters who seem to be exploring their own frames just as certainly as they are learning to live in a strange, new country. The lucidly cool color compositions and the simple strains of mournful music further add to the sense of strangeness that seeps into us, to the feeling that none of the characters are quite in touch with one another, to that haunting atmosphere of foreigners lost in a strange country that really permeates all of Wenders's films. (Wenders has said he was attracted to this project by the idea of dealing with the first generation of Europeans in America.) It is a feeling perhaps more clearly defined in his next film, *Alice in the Cities*, where the strangers wander lost in their own country.

Shot in 1974 in a grainy black and white whose contrast is occasionally too high, *Alice in the Cities*, though not quite as successful as *The Goalie's Anxiety*, has more of a story than Wenders's other films and is possibly the most affecting. Phillip (played by Rudiger Vogeler), a depressed and nearly broke German journalist in New York, suddenly finds himself responsible for Alice, whose mother has abandoned her (Alice is stunningly, maturely, portrayed by Yella Rott-

lander, who also plays Pearl in *Scarlet Letter*). Together they return to Germany and try to locate Alice's relatives.

The first part of the film, shot in the New York area, includes a series of tritely handled sequences depicting homogenized, roadside USA, with television sets constantly playing old movies and bad commercials in hotel rooms that all resemble one another. In addition, all the vignettes with Americans—a used-car salesman, a black boy on a bicycle, an airline stewardess—seem stilted, as if Wenders was trying too hard to get these Americans to be . . . Americans. Back in Germany, the film becomes more sure of itself.

The heart of the film lies in the relationship that develops between Phillip and Alice as they search for her grandmother's house. In the course of their travels the two of them, both lonely and depressed at the start, grow closer. This film has been compared with Peter Bogdanovich's *Paper Moon*, to which it bears a superficial resemblance. But the relationship of Alice and Phillip actually bears a stronger resemblance, in a junior category sort of way, to the screen relationship of Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall, who, with their extremely self-conscious way of clowning, of talking in innuendos, established a bond of such innate understanding between themselves that their roles seemed to merge into something entirely new. And something of this same alchemy develops between Alice and Phillip in the course of their travels. There's a sense of play, of teasing, that grows between them that is simply lovely to watch—the way they perform calisthenics on a park green with a perfect physical sense of each other's movements, and yet at the same time parody the exercises themselves, or the way they mimic and double-mimic each other's expressions inside an instant-photo booth. The rapport, the sense of themselves that they develop, becomes their own saving grace in a world portrayed otherwise bleakly. Their vulnerabilities, their sensitivity to each other's vulnerabilities, become their strength. So it's not surprising that, late in the film, Alice gets upset when Phillip sleeps with a German woman he's just met and he in turn becomes defensive. It's really like a betrayal.

One theme that does not come off too well in the film revolves around the use of photographs. Phillip constantly takes pictures with his Polaroid while talking about their meaning, and Alice carries a snapshot of her grandmother's house, which is the only clue to where she lives. But the whole grab bag of artistic themes and motifs—reality versus images, sterility and creativity, the nature of illusions—is summoned up in a way that feels forced, and so symbols become things that are more easily exploited than explored. This is not the case in the harsh and lovely *Kings of the Road* (*Im Lauf Der Zeit—In the Course of Time* or *As Time Goes By*, which is what it would have been called if rights problems had not intervened).

In the final scene of *Kings of the Road* (1976), Bruno, a traveling projector repairman, talks with an elderly woman who has closed down her movie house because the distributors no longer offer anything except films that exploit sex and violence. Wenders, who often displays a sly sense of humor, presents this episode quite seriously. Our reaction might have been, "We know all this," but there is such a bone-dry integrity to the scene that we find ourselves agreeing with, rather than scorning, the obvious intentions of the filmmaker.

*Kings of the Road* is a long, harsh film about the exhaustion and the abandonment of people, places, and the movie industry. Shot in a very technically sharp, hard-edged black and white, it *looks* bleak. The bleak precision of the photography in fact—a precision common to Wenders's films—serves as an icy counterpoint to the general vagueness of the film's actual story. It's a form to contain the generally formless lives of his characters. And because the photography is so coldly precise, those brief scenes such as the above mentioned one, which do carry some measure of emotional resonance, come across all the stronger.

Bruno (played by Rudiger Volgeler, the journalist of *Alice*) lives in a van and drives from town to town repairing projectors in run-down movie houses. Robert, recently separated from his wife, does research in child linguistics. The two meet one morning when Robert, in a suicide attempt so careless that it seems he doesn't even care whether he succeeds or not, drives his Volks-

wagen at full speed into a river. Bruno, laughing, watches as Robert climbs out and plods to shore. The two men decide to travel together, and the film becomes the story of their trip through northern Germany, in the underpopulated and desolate region that runs parallel to the East German border.

It's a simple structure, a picaresque, episodic story based on the road—*Tom Jones, Huckleberry Finn, On the Road, Easy Rider*—and the road, along which life unwinds, is the classical metaphor for time. But within this simplest of frameworks Wenders works to strip the mechanics down still further. The film is teeming with vignettes alive with fruitful possibilities—possibilites that are always allowed to fade out. Bruno meets a woman who works at a local movie house outside a bumper-car ride, and we expect a prototypical amusement park scene like the one we got in *400 Blows.* (Even Bresson, the severest of filmmakers, couldn't resist showing us a bumper-car ride in its entirety in *Mouchette.*) But then, with the scene hardly under way, it's over; we see that our own expectations were artificial, founded upon previous films rather than any real experience. Later, Bruno spends an apparent sexless night with this same woman who at one point says to him. "I live with my daughter and I want it to stay that way." In the morning she cries a little. They separate. We don't really know what transpired, everything remains underneath, in undertones. Yet the spare details—even the *missing* details—seem enough for us to fill in all we need to know about the characters.

In this way each sequence of shots refuses to capitalize on the momentum of the preceding sequence, or even on itself. Accordingly, the film seems to be constantly starting out down new roads after making false detours. Episodes remain isolated moments, unlinked. Hence, *In the Course of Time* (a more truly ironic title than the American one, *Kings of the Road*) is a film about the discontinuity of time, and this is perfectly in keeping with that disturbing subcurrent of feeling that runs through most of Wenders's films, the feeling that the characters have no real future—disturbing precisely because it corresponds in some unspeakable way to our own feelings that the world itself seems to be winding

KINGS OF THE ROAD

down. Events, which are uniformly accidental, transient, inter-changeable, do not add up to anything recognizably sequential, which is what we expect a life to be. In this sense Wenders's characters are close cousins to the aimless young people in the films of Godard, who spoke of "the present, where the future is more present than the present."

Yet if this film consisted of merely discontinous segments, it would leave little or no impression on us. This is not the case.

Slowly, imperceptibly, the film pulls together before our eyes and emerges as a coherent whole that progresses not along the usual dramatic story line but by cautiously circling around certain returned-to areas of experience, drawing closer and closer to the elusive heart of the matter. In an incident late in the film Bruno and Robert are woken up one night by a young man who sits atop a grain elevator, weeping as he drops rocks down the echoing metal shaft. In a stark shot looking out across the moonlit fields we see a smashed car alongside a tree, and we learn, though with typical indirection, that the man's wife killed herself. This brief scene possesses such an unnerving eloquence that we nearly forget that what was treated lightly at the beginning of the film—Robert's own inept suicide attempt—has here been returned to but on a more deeply felt level.

Moreover, almost all of these seemingly disconnected scenes are intended to bring about some aspect of the problems of communication. I don't want to labor the point, but it becomes obvious in a scene where Robert and his father, both of whom work in communications (journalism and

linguistics), try to talk about the father's marriage, but fail. Ideas and symbols are nothing without the feelings on which they rest, and *Alice in the Cities* is in part unsuccessful because too often the ideas and symbols remain just that. In *Kings of the Road* they are for the most part invested to the right degree with the feelings behind them, and consequently this movie, without demanding that we be fully conscious of all that's going on, affects us, has resonance.

(Incidentally, this refusal of Wenders to get excited about story telling, which he had just about formalized in *The Goalie's Anxiety*, is a trait he shares with the Austrian writer, Peter Handke, who also scripted Wenders's *Wrong Movement*. It's as if stories are a deception, a useless fiction; this notion perhaps gets more clearly articulated in Handke's brief book about his mother's life and suicide, *A Sorrow Beyond Dreams*, in which her own codified life is seen in terms of a missing story, or rather, a story which never took off: "No possibilities, it was all settled in advance.")

A strong sense of childhood, of a yearning for it, runs through this film, and it coincides with a symbolic yearning for the early days of cinema, a yearning that is evoked in a scene where Bruno, asked to repair the sound system in a children's theater, improvises with Robert a shadow show behind the screen, much to the delight of the children. The scene ends when their silent show ends. And throughout the film we see Robert watching children float paper boats down a stream, or removing a flattened coin from a railroad track. Wenders himself cannot give us a shot without a river or a railroad track in the distant background without a boat floating by or a train roaring past. This fascination with childhood is not simply sentimentality, but rather ties in with the sense that, in a world whose future looks dim, children seem to represent the only concrete link to that future. And at the same time they serve as a reminder of a certain grace, a certain simplicity of style, of playfulness, that has much to do with Wenders's aesthetic.

There are long silences in *Kings of the Road*, as one might well expect in a movie about people's difficulties in making themselves heard or understood. Visually this translates into an austerity of images, of long tracking shots on the road, of the camera following the line of telephone wires as they trail off against the sky.

The camera work of Robbie Muller, who has been director of photography for all of Wenders's films, is just about faultless in this film—the framing is always ruthlessly clean and balanced, with shapes and contrasts played with a precisionist's eye. As in *The Goalie's Anxiety*, the camera work alone makes this film worth seeing. And certainly one would hope for no less from a film whose hero himself is obsessed with fixing projectors and making sure that films are projected properly. The focus is generally hard and sharp, the frame often desolate—long, empty, static shots of a bleak countryside, with its underpopulated border towns. Our interest, which in the hands of a lesser director, would surely wane, is held throughout by the sheer strength, grace, and wit of the camera work. *Kings of the Road* is one of those rare films—Godard has made several—where we are conscious throughout the actual viewing that almost any still would make a first-rate photograph. And the film also makes us conscious of frames themselves: of the double windshield of the parked van, which Bruno and Robert often lean against as they talk; of the skylight in the van through which we see the brilliant night clouds passing by overhead; of Bruno poking his head through the small window that opens into the cashier's box at the movie house, so that he's framed by all sorts of movie advertisements and posters: and in one lovely, stunningly executed shot we see Bruno and Robert in sharp close-up as they drive; the landscape, perfectly horizontal, whizzing by in the background; and on the curve of the rearview mirror the landscape, perfectly vertical, unwinding in a blur like a reel. All this isn't merely pretty; rather, it brings a certain metaphorical element of depth and precision to the film, like, say, the infinitely reflecting mirrors of *Lady from Shanghai*. It becomes Wenders's way of asserting control over a film whose characters, while not lacking depth, lack those situations, lack the world in which they might have grown and become more. The film's fragmentary mood is counterbalanced by the coherence of the film's visual style, and the film itself becomes a meditation on outward realities because the inner will not do. It's almost as if

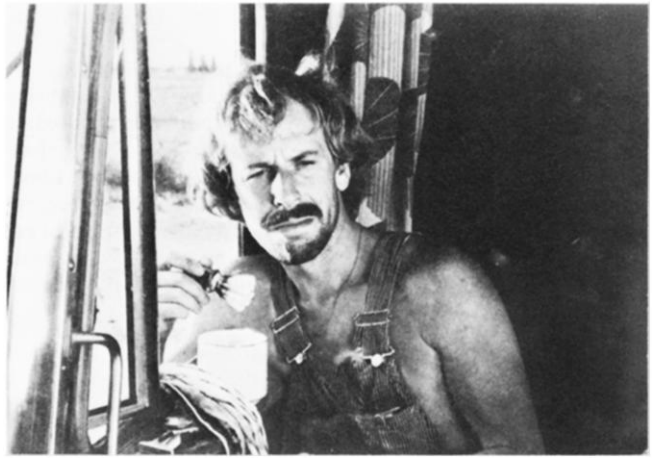
there's a need for surfaces to absorb oneself in—we feel how fragile Wenders's own control is in the relentless way he manipulates and balances the images; the deceptively calm surfaces belie the inner tensions of the characters, and the screen itself becomes charged with the resultant tensions.

And if the world Wenders presents is one in which the proliferating modes of communication have failed us, leaving in their wake vast stretches of silence, then the visual correspondence would, as we might expect, discover itself in as economical a reduction of images as possible, in a spare use of panning, zooming, and tracking in and out, in camera work that, brilliant as it is, remains strangely unfancy. Bazin pointed out that with depth of focus Welles was able to resolve into a single shot an action whose meaning in the past required several shots to clarify. Now, with the development of faster film stock, more refined and expensive lenses, the temptation for many directors has been to use depth of focus to fill the frame up with all sorts of nonsense, as if some resonance might possibly result from the collision of all that clutter on the screen. In *Kings of the Road* Wenders has simply cleared the frame and allowed the screen to breathe. Even the interior shots of the van, which is filled with a bunk bed, movie projectors, an old jukebox and more, seem unusually free of clutter.

Finally though—and this is what makes Wenders seem so peculiarly modern—he has allowed a certain unspeakable, invisible, yet omnipresent sense of strangeness to seep into his films. What these films transmit—and *Kings of the Road* in particular—is the dread feeling that all roads now lead nowhere, and that the writing is already on the wall. Despite the deliberate eschewing of storytelling, the rejection of psychologies as methods of comprehension, the missing or confused motivations, the spare or alternately pleonastic use of dialogue, despite all these things—or because of them—I don't think Wenders is trying to be consciously uncommercial (although *Kings of the Road*, with its abandoned and pornographic movie houses, is, as a film, aware of the decay of commercial cinema) or that he's working out of some perverse vein of arrogance and whimsy. For despite the lack of all those things mentioned above, there remains too powerful a residue of feeling in his movies, a feeling that resides in the absence as well as in the presence of things. The artificial discontinuities, the willful fragmentation often practiced by experimental film-makers (this holds for Wenders's early film, *Summer in the City*, which looks like a student film with its long, dull tracking shots of city streets and its drawn-out static shots of people reading newspapers and watching TV) usually prove irritating because the points scored almost always seem intellectual or aesthetic in the worst sense. I think Wenders succeeds for the most part in his films precisely because the lack of connections is real, deeply felt and worked out accordingly; because the characters, who all seem to live in the outlands of existence (which are becoming more and more interchangeable with Main Street) are groping for these lost connections.

Dislocation, both psychological and geographical, has always been one of Wenders's major concerns, and his most recent film, *The American Friend*, based on Patricia Highsmith's thriller *Ripley's Game*, integrates these concerns in ways that his earlier films only hinted at. The severity of the plotless *Kings of the Road*, with its spare, black-and-white photography, has given way to a visually opulent trilingual production that—at $1.2 million—cost more than Wenders's previous five films put together. "What attracted me to the Highsmith novel was I thought I had room enough for my own stories inside the structure of the novel—and when I say, 'my own stories,' I mean for instance living in the cities, or traveling, or losing control of oneself."

Shot in a new color stock that was only recently developed, the intense colors of this film seem to



KINGS OF THE ROAD ►

compose themselve around the astonishingly chilly blues and reds which themselves become an important part of the story, defining the landscape through which the characters move. The story leaps continually back and forth between the United States and Europe, between Germany and France, as it follows the dealings of a shady American, Tom Ripley (Dennis Hopper), who, wearing his cowboy hat, picks up in New York's Soho the paintings of Derwatt, a "dead" American artist (Nicholas Ray), which he then sells at Hamburg auctions to dealers who will resell them to rich Texans. When someone asks this cowboy what he does for a living, he replies, "I make money. . . . I'm bringing the Beatles back to Hamburg." Quite fittingly, he lives in Germany in a mansion that looks as if it might have been transplanted from Monticello or the University of Virginia.

It is also Ripley who sets the film's convoluted plot in motion. He suggests to a French gangster in need of an unknown gunman Jonathan Zimmerman (Bruno Ganz), a gentle Swiss who lives in Hamburg with his wife and child, and who makes his living constructing picture frames. Why Jonathan? For one he is dying of leukemia, his life has little value, and so there is a chance he might want to leave his wife and child a large sum of money. Perhaps more importantly, he once snubbed Ripley at a gallery auction and now Ripley wants to prove that Jonathan is as corruptible as anyone else. He does. After some initial hesitations Jonathan, who is unaware of Ripley's involvement, agrees, kills one man in the Paris Metro, then loses his nerve on the second assignment at which point Ripley, who suspected he might bungle it, suddenly appears and saves Jonathan's life by killing a Mafia captain along with his bodyguard—or so he thinks—on the Hamburg-Munich express.

Narrative plotting has never been one of Wenders's strengths. It has been his strength in fact to avoid plotting in such a deliberately conscious way as to make clear the film syntax that usually governs films in general (and genre films in particular), and which, by extension, governs our own consciousness. Consequently, it perhaps was to be expected that, trying to satisfy his own requirements while fulfilling those of the genre, he would not carry off this complicated thriller with total success. Loose ends abound everywhere, and unlike those in his earlier films they annoy. Nor is this film as fast-paced and as exhilarating as *The Big Sleep*, where we are left not really caring whether or not we followed all the actions. (Wenders himself, aware of some of the plot confusions, has cited *The Big Sleep* in his defense.)

Yet *The American Friend* manages to fascinate in a way that thrillers seldom do; it is a profoundly sad and bleak film. Unlike most thrillers, it subordinates plot to the characterizations (this is true of Highsmith's novels themselves) while the usual strong sense of location—Chandler's "Los Angeles," Hammet's "San Francisco"—is replaced by an overwhelming sense of dislocation. The feelings of rootlessness, of homesickness, of lack of personal identity, that run through *Alice in the Cities*, *Wrong Movement*, and *Kings of the Road*, become in *The American Friend* an actual function of the rapid cutting from shot to shot, so that the establishing shots of New York, Hamburg, and Paris follow each other so rapidly that they fail to establish anything. In *Alphaville* Godard made a science fiction film about the future, but instead of using constructed sets he used the most advanced examples of urban architecture he could find in Paris and its suburbs. The lesson was clear and now Wenders has elected to photograph similar architecture, with similar purposes in mind (playing with space rather than time). The opening long shot in New York's Soho looks down a vista of old tenements towards the twin towers of the World Trade Center. The Eiffel Tower remains to identify Paris, but just barely, for it has been pushed all the way to the far side of the frame, crowded out of the picture by the skyline of new, taller office towers. And when we see the Statue of Liberty it is not the original one in New York, but a small replica on an island in the Seine. The film in effect describes a worldwide homesickness.

This powerful sense of geographical dislocation finds its psychological correlative in the characters of Jonathan and Ripley. Ripley, the American liberated from local and national boundaries, does not feel at home anywhere. Efficient in his shady dealings, he is also cursed with a touch of *Angst*, which is not quite in line with someone of

his trade. He keeps a journal—not in a notebook—by talking into his cassette recorder: "Today is December 6, 1976, and I know less and less who I am, or who anybody else is." It is not on a par with Roquentin's diary, yet it affects precisely because Ripley is a pathetic sort of gangster and his confusion, as self-indulgent and poorly articulated as it is, makes itself felt. (Incidentally, an advertising poster for the film gives us a front shot of Ripley as he waits in his parked car at night looking tense and smoking a cigarette while holding something that looks like a walkie-talkie next to his ear. It's a classical thriller genre shot: one would guess he's in communication with someone as together they stalk their quarry. So it comes as a crazy surprise when we learn the object he's holding is a cassette recorder and that he's playing back his diary.) Also, his diary remarks are true. When he says he does not know who anybody is, he may be thinking of Jonathan, whom he himself has transformed into someone very different from the person he was when Ripley first met him. Even visually Jonathan undergoes a metamorphosis, looking less and less like the craftsman we see in the beginning, and more and more like a deranged underworld figure. There is one scene in a hotel room where he practices using his gun in front of a mirror, a scene as disturbing as DeNiro's hotel room exercises in *Taxi Driver.* This gentle man who has provided his son with all sorts of wonderful visual and cinematic toys changes, in the last days of his life into a new person, removing himself even from his wife Marianne (Lisa Kreuzer) who cares for him but, sensing he's become involved in some sort of shady business, begins to withdraw her affection.

The precarious friendship that develops between Jonathan and Ripley cannot compensate for this loss. Early in the film Jonathan, ashamed of a former rudeness, gives Ripley a gift: it's a small photograph of a man which, when tilted, changes his expression. What's clear is that Jonathan is fascinated by the mechanics, the style of the thing. Genuinely moved, Ripley presents Jonathan with a small box which, when held up to the light and looked into, reveals nude women. It's the contents that fascinate Ripley.

Yet it's Ripley, the psychopathic American seducing an innocent man into murder, who worries more and more about the consequences of his actions, about his own state of grace. Not since *Easy Rider* has Dennis Hopper given such a fine performance (he hums a Byrds tune from that movie in *The America Friend*) and in one brief scene that goes a long way in establishing Ripley's self-doubts, he lies down on a pool table beneath the glare of the overhead lights, beads of perspiration running down his anxious face, and takes pictures of himself with a Polaroid which ejects the photographs one after another so that they rain down all about him.

THE AMERICAN FRIEND

Still, there's something of the Marshall Plan about Ripley in the way he enters Jonathan's shop and crowds him into his small work space in back while offering him friendship, work, and money. (In so many of the shots Ripley actually seems to be trying to crowd Jonathan out of the frame.) By the end of the film, after involving Jonathan in five murders and causing an irreconciliable breach between Jonathan and his wife, it's clear when he sits alone on the beach singing Dylan's "I Pity the Poor Immigrant" that he still doesn't understand why in the end Jonathan rejected his friendship.

Wenders has said that "film language is always political: it is either exploitation or it isn't exploitation . . . not only the story that is told, but the way it is told." On one level it comes down to something as simple as this: there are different ways to film a man being garroted, and even in a movie as good as *The Godfather* the temptation has been to shoot the scene in such a way that

we're more astonished by the resourcefulness of the make-up team than we are concerned with the actual dynamics of what is happening: that is, when Sollozzo chokes Luca Brasi to death we watch with a fascinated sort of horror as Luca's eyeballs nearly jump from their sockets. Roughly speaking, it's entertaining. In *The American Friend* when Ripley loops a garrote over a gangster's head we don't actually watch the man's life being choked out of him: what we do see is a pained look on Ripley's face. Also, the garroting requires a fair amount of exertion.

More broadly, Wenders is talking about the ability of films to change the way we look at the world by changing the way we look at films, by calling into question *in the film itself* the already codified grammars of other films. Even the way a landscape is shot tells us something about the director's worldview, whether it is a static or a dynamic one. Think of *Swept Away* with its Air Mediterranean shots of surf crashing on long white beaches; of Joseph Strick's most recent disaster, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, where the shots of the lushly green Irish countryside give back to us . . . the Irish countryside. These are shots that have nothing to do with their films, they're descriptive passages that describe nothing; they could have been edited into any one of a hundred other films, the hundred other films from which in fact they've been extracted.

In contrast, towards the end of *The American Friend* when more people are dead than Ripley knows what to do with and everything seems to have come apart, we get a shot whose luminosity is so intense and dream-like it's disquieting: Ripley has driven an ambulance loaded with corpses up onto the wet sands of a beach at dawn, and the quality of the silver-blue light reflecting off the sands is such that we cannot tell where the shoreline ends and the ocean begins—the ambulance seems to be swimming. And it is exactly this sense of confusion, of disorientation, coming at this precise moment near the film's end, that makes this shot so unsettling, and makes it seem a summary of all the larger confusions about place and identity that have preceded it. The shot in effect describes itself. It belongs nowhere else.

Wenders links up with a new generation of German and Austrian film-makers and writers, a group that includes Fassbinder, Herzog, and Alexander Kluge, the playwrights Franz Xaver Kroetz and Peter Handke; most of them came of age in the turmoil of the sixties. Between them there has been an extraordinarily happy degree of cross-fertilization:Fassbinder has directed a Handke play, and he has used a Kroetz play as the basis for his film *Wildwechsel*; Wenders, as mentioned, has collaborated with Handke on film scripts and has helped produce Handke's first film; and we see the same actors and actresses moving in and out of all the films. And while the visions and methods of these artists range over a great deal of different territory, most of them have in common a leftist worldview that speaks more of a concern with the state of contemporary consciousness, or anxiety, than it does of Germany's special past. At one point in *Kings of the Road* Bruno picks up a newspaper and reads a headline about a terrorist bombing in Jerusalem, and the viewer of course is aware that this is a German reading it. But more often than not it is America, for better and for worse, that has come to occupy a central place in these artists' consciousnesses. In Fassbinder's *Fox and his Friends*, Fox gets propositioned in a pinball gallery by two American GIs stationed in Germany. And in *Kings of the Road* Bruno and Robert pass a night in an abandoned GI bunker on the East German border, drinking Jack Daniels and making jokes about the Americans who "have colonized our subconscious."

In taking leave of Germany's past, of the Nazi enterprise that was the burden of an earlier generation of German artists—Heinrich Böll, Gunter Grass, the Gruppe 47—and which left the German film industry in ruins, these younger artists have brought to world literature and cinema a new and startling art with an appeal at once personal and international. *Kings of the Road* opens with a prologue in which an ex-Nazi party member explains to Bruno that he was unable to get his movie theater back until he sued in 1951. But its epilogue, about the closing of the old woman's movie theater, could have been set in any western country.

Wenders's own films will be disliked by some because they won't know what to make of these characters who seem so absurdly out of touch. Also, his unassuming humor often belies the seriousness of his intent, which will bother those people who like their art high-minded down the line. Moreover—and there's no getting around this—his films finally are depressing, and this has rarely struck a receptive box-office chord.

Consequently, his audience, although an international one, will probably remain limited to those people who share a similar set of values, similar frames of literary, film, and pop music references; who, in short, perceive the world in basically similar ways. There's a radical distress in his films that I don't believe even Fassbinder, despite his white-heat anger and his more obviously anticapitalist intentions, makes felt, and which few American film-makers have begun to approach. (An interesting American companion piece to *Kings of the Road* is—not *Easy Rider*, which Wenders gently parodies—but David Burton Morris's and Victoria Wozniak's *Loose Ends*, an independently produced film about two working-class males who take to the road to escape the drudgery of their lives. Like *Kings of the Road*, this movie makes it a point not to romanticize either the road or the traditional male bonds of friendship.)

It would be wrong to see Wenders's minimal tendencies as simply an aesthetic direction rather than as his reflection of a world that seems increasingly fragile and tenuous, with the constantly shifting moods of the films emphasizing his transience. His films are all low-keyed, understated; there's something casual, almost fortuitous, about them: no great intellectual weight is brought into the discourse. So when we finally realize how deeply he has gone with all his offhand jokes, chance encounters, accidents, semi-anecdotes, rootless characters and so forth, it comes as a beautiful surprise.

MICHAEL DEMPSEY

# Ken Russell, Again

## IN PRINT AND FILM

The Ken Russell Problem is back on the agenda, thanks to *Valentino* and to *Ken Russell: The Adaptor As Creator*, by Joseph Gomez.* This full-scale critical study, published before the release of *Valentino*, features a Rousseauesque Russell beaming on the cover and bears his imprimatur: an introduction quoting forgotten critics who applied the Hysterical-Lurid-Crazy sticker to his artist subjects the way most of their modern counterparts do to his films. Gomez has written a patient, detailed refutation of this persistent cliché. Combining biography and criticism, he trails the director from birth to *Lisztomania*. A sketch from childhood turns up a 9.5 mm Pathescope projector like the fabled machine which became Ingmar Bergman's first magic lantern. Some snapshots of youthful isolation and woolgathering lead to a vignette from the Royal Naval College: cadet Russell staging drag versions of Betty Grable and Dorothy Lamour movies. Then come a nervous breakdown after service with "a modern-day Captain Bligh," the discovery of classical music during recuperation, stints as a ballet dancer and chorus line hoofer, a bit of photographic study, marriage, and conversion to Catholicism. From the Church, says Russell, "I suddenly found a

*New York: Pergamon Press, 1977.

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direction, and I've known what I've been trying to do ever since"—though the Church couldn't have bargained on it. Two of the book's well-chosen stills—lensman Russell in a rumpled suit staring arrogantly as his foot hovers over a globe, a honeymoon shot of his wife dressed as Emily Brontë—add to the impression of an Edwardian fantasy which could be outtakes from his movies.

Russell made amateur shorts, then began working on films about artists for the BBC. Gomez describes how he clashed with staid company policies, stretched tiny budgets, rejected "pedestrian faithfulness" to facts ands chronology when they got in the way of what he regarded as deeper truths, sought to interpret with film as literary biographers do with words. Evidently, Gomez has seen most of Russell's thirty-four BBC films, and he charts the experiments of several: *Bartok; The Debussy Film; Isadora Duncan, The Biggest Dancer in the World; Dante's Inferno; Song of Summer;* and *The Dance of the Seven Veils,* which ignited Parliamentary outrage by portraying Richard Strauss as a cartooned Nazi fellow-traveller. No one has provided closer readings of these films or what Gomez calls their "tripartite structure . . . the 'facts' (be they historical or supplied by a novel, play or rock opera), the legendary image or self-imposed view that historical personages or fictional characters have of themselves, and finally Russell's own attitude or, in some cases, his response." Gomez describes how and why Russell deviates from facts, quotes excerpts from scripts, and supplies stray tidbits: the technical inadequacies of Elstree Studios which hobbled *The Boy Friend*, extravaganzas from unfilmed projects recycled into the later films. *Women in Love, The Music Lovers, Savage Messiah,* and *Mahler* receive a chapter apiece; *The Devils* fills two; *Tommy* splits one with *Lisztomania; French Dressing, Billion Dollar Brain,* and *The Boy Friend* share the remaining scraps. All of which makes Russell "the most significant filmmaker presently working in Great Britain."

True enough, but whoppingly anticlimactic, and that points up the book's weakness. As the quotations illustrate, Gomez tends to write diligent, careful, but plodding, fussy prose. His soberness never takes wing; he notes more than he evokes surprising leaps and the firecracker comedy of Russell's best work. Understandably, he wanted a style that would rebuke the foaming-at-the-mouth which usually passes for Russell criticism. But the drawback is that he works a little too hard to make Russell academically respectable, which too often means research instead of insight. His treatment of the theatrical features is uneven. The chapters about *The Devils,* one on sources, the other on the film, marshal their ideas with force and clarity. Gomez is also good on the precedents and the flaws of *Women in Love,* and he alertly maps the lacunae of *The Music Lovers.* But *Savage Messiah* and *Mahler* find him more prosaic, tracking down their links to other material better than he teases out their lyricism and perversity. He spent time on the set of *Tommy,* but his remarks on it and *Lisztomania* are skimpy. And he gets slightly entangled in his "adaptor as creator" thesis. In movies, adaptation generally means filming literary fiction, not a Russell specialty, but Gomez dutifully retraces the steps of George Bluestone and others. On other pages, "adaptor" means "biographer," which is more pertinent but still slights certain films. Had he subordinated these notions to Russell's personality and interests a bit more, he might have shed the book's intermittent plumpness. But these are quibbles compared to the breadth and the intelligence of his indespensible work; all lovers of film should get busy reading and debating him.

Topic A for this debate should be the change in Russell's work since *Savage Messiah*—for the worse. Gomez isolates flaws in the recent films but finds them purely local weaknesses; Russell is simply favoring one element of his triple structure in this or that movie—no sweat. But this does not explain the loss of emotional force in them, the growing emphasis on razzle-dazzle as an end in itself, the increasing penchant for literal-minded visual sermons.

*Mahler* is especially bewildering; rarely has one movie been so extraordinary and so godawful at the same time. Its brilliance flows from its choice of subject. Sallow yet steady, conceited and tender, cruel and loving, the film's Mahler is no paragon of humanism. But he has what none of Russell's subsequent heroes can claim: the director's unstinting respect. So does Mahler's wife, Alma, both a neurotic shrew and an angel of feeling,

raging over the life she has sacrificed to her husband while yearning to fuse her soul with his genius. Together, they give the splintered movie a core of power and some wonderful sequences. When in a paroxysm of longing, silliness, and joy, Alma scurries over hill and dell silencing steeple bells, lowing animals, and revellers so that Mahler can work in peace, the balance of comedy and sweetness is eerily pefect. Later, in one of film's most moving elegies, she buries her spurned songs at the base of a tree and lies down on the grave in tears; Russell then cuts to Georgina Hale's amber, throaty voice years later, still transfixed by her loss. Probably no other director could have brought off the enraptured sorrow of this passage. But the rest of the movie more often flounders in pedagogue set pieces. A long skit of Mahler turning Catholic to win Cosima Wagner's approval has him hammering Stars of David into swords, crooning anti-Semitic lyrics to "The Ride of the Valkyries," and washing down pork with milk while she cavorts in sequined Nazi leather and black lipstick. On paper, it must have been a knockout. On screen, it is mistimed, preachy, rhythmless. A dream of Alma escaping a chrysalis strains for symbolism but obstinately remains a girl-mummy writhing in gauze. Stormtroopers goosestep through Mahler's funeral fantasy although, as Gomez points out, the composer could not have conjured them up since he died before Nazism first appeared. These stolid production numbers crush the pat ideas which supposedly motivate them. Russell is simply playing around, without backing enough to keep them from resembling cheesy student films.

*Tommy* is the worst of *Mahler* with flash, nonstop one-note charades. It trades Russell's usual artists for The Who's catatonic vegetable ingenue and reveals his hatred for the Twentieth Century. The trouble isn't the hatred; who would deny the provocations? It's the bludgeoning, strident expression of that hatred, unrelieved by contrasting emotions, which makes the movie such a scolding, tiresome experience. Russell solicits our tears for his shnooky hero, who gets exploited by everybody, turns into a Christ-like zombie, cops the pinball championship of the globe, becomes guru of a religious Thriftimart, then renounces venal ambition in a blaze of Cosmic Uplift. But we were never asked merely to sob over Tchaikovsky, Urbain Grandier, or Henri Gaudier-Brzeska; their fates were tragic, while Tommy's is just a soap opera with a flowerpower ending. Despite the music's paeans to Love, Russell can't respect a lump like Tommy, so he must pile on the virtuosity. Some of it is remarkable: Elton John pinballing in seven league boots, an incandescent suit of armor bristling with hypodermic needles, a TV vomiting goop all over orgasmic Ann-Margret and her Boudoir Beautiful. But since Russell can find nothing to affirm in this carnival of hype, groupie-locusts, an engulfing corruption, he can only wear us out with overkill. Tommy's bliss on a holy mountain is all the transcendence we get, and it's the kind of calendar art which Russell parodied in *Women in Love* and *The Music Lovers*.

THE DEVILS

In *Lisztomania*, even the thin narrative thread of *Mahler* and *Tommy* snaps. This broken-backed fantasia tries to regain lost ground by dealing with an artist instead of a meatball, only to shellack him with scorn for half its running time, then veer desperately into *Wagnerphobia* just to keep itself lurching along until Liszt's convenient change from pop sellout to harbinger of artistic integrity. Again, hatred and chaos dominate. Russell shafts Liszt for playing to the groundlings and slaughters Wagner once more for being the seedbed of Nazi evil. The indictments may be well taken; they certainly reflect Russell's naive, yet appealing desire for his artists to be as noble as their works. But he bends the film into a pretzel to level them with all the nuance of a hanging judge; Liszt might just as well be Barry Manilow and Wagner Heinrich Himmler. Some of Russell's sideshows are hilari-

ous: a Chaplinesque spoof of the starving artist, a berserk sex farce with courtesans straddling Liszt's howitzer-sized penis. A vision of Hitler massacring Jews with a machine-gun guitar bursts its cartoon bounds and achieves genuinely satanic power. The ending, Liszt zapping Nazi horror with his rocket ship and then soaring away euphorically into outer space, has a likable fairy tale aura; we want to believe in its faux-naif optimism. But singling out these sequences—and others which are tacky and trite—is just taking pot luck, because there is no structure or shaping intelligence to bind them together.

As a project, *Valentino* seemed to offer a way to recoup. The famed sheik of the silent screen—an Italian immigrant who passed from gigolo and cabaret dancer to bit player in two reelers and nondescript features, then won phenomenal fame as a heartthrob in big adventure-romances, only to get caught up in the contradictions of stardom and the cultural ambitions of his wife, dying in 1926 at the age of 31—suggested both a congenial Russell subject and a refreshing change of setting. A half-mythic star no longer alive for moviegoers as other recent subjects of Hollywood biopics, such as W. C. Fields or Gable and Lombard, still are, Rudolph Valentino could be impersonated without worry about comparison to the original. And the period seemed ideal, only half a century old yet redolent of a primordial dreamworld, without the facetiousness which sinks *Nickelodeon*. Why shouldn't Ken Russell be the first film-maker to capture in its own medium the amazing, volatile blend of idealism and crassness, crudity and delicacy, hominess and decadence, brutality and grandeur in film's American infancy?

Because, as it turns out, he can't find anything but the crass, the crude, the decadent, and the brutal in it. Repeatedly cutting from the dead star lying in state to the high points of his life, *Valentino* blows every major opportunity which comes its way because, again, Russell has no profound regard for his protagonist. His Rudy is an ingratiating innocent who wants only to retire and grow oranges. Though obviously untrained as an actor, Rudolph Nureyev uses his dancer's training and carriage to give the character warmth, magnetism, and open-hearted courage. But this Valentino is no kind of artist, just a sweet, helpless lamb shorn to death by the studio system, the sexual bigotry of the American public, and the flossy fakery of his wife Natacha Rambova. Russell's opinion of Valentino's talents may be correct, but it leaves him nothing to seek from us besides easy sympathy. This dilutes even his venom. By his standards, the film is remarkably detached and mild, except for a fictionalized episode which shows sadists, whores, and perverts torturing Rudy in jail —and this plays as though it were shot by Michael Winner being "inspired" by Russell.

In one sprightly scene, June Mathis runs a comic short which co-stars Valentino as an oily seducer-thief; she pitches him as the male lead in *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* to another Metro executive, who can't believe that the women of America wouldn't prefer cocaine-snorting boy-next-door Wally Reid. Later, after Mathis finally wangles him a screen test, Valentino comes to see her in a sweatshirt and a straw boater. Informed that the hero of *Apocalypse* is a romantic gaucho, he drops his garbled Yankee accent like lightning and rattles off his long real name with continental aplomb. With concise wit and charm, these moments show why the timing was right for his breakthrough. But Russell can't develop them; he spends most of his time knifing the grossness and stupidity of Twenties Tinseltown, where "it's always Halloween." Once, when a monstrously fat comedian, obviously based on Fatty Arbuckle, sashays into a night club, roaring like a rogue elephant and chortling garishly as he stings hands and heads with a joy buzzer, the movie gives us a pungent whiff of bloated, obscene carnality. Otherwise, it's ducks-in-a-barrel time: a dopey starlet munching french fries in her mansion, movie cowboys blasting each other with prop guns, a putteed director in the San Fernando Valley, dowager artistes in Hispano Suizas, the corn of Rudy's movies. When Rambova looks at a battlefield set and snorts, "What an awful lot of horseshit!" she is delivering Russell's own remarkably ungenerous assessment of his predecessors. His recreated bits from *Blood and Sand, Apocalypse,* and *The Sheik* give nobody any points, convey nobody caught up in the possibilities of movies, as even *Nickelodeon* managed to do in its closing scenes. Russell displays Valentino, nude except for a burnoose, trysting with Rambova in his tent,

then cuts to him enacting a rape scene there for *The Sheik*, and all we get from the contrast is a facile laugh when we could have had some insight into silent screen acting or the differences between personality and persona in Rudy.

Incredibly, after doing so well with complex women like Gudrun Brangwen, Sophie Brzeska, and Alma Mahler, Russell flops with the major women in Valentino's life. June Mathis, one of the most influential figures of silent film-making, the final editor of *Greed* and an instigator of the first *Ben-Hur*, begins brightly thanks to Felicity Kendal (more buxom since she played the heroine of *Shakespeare Wallah*) but soon becomes moonstruck and teary with infatuation. The Russian actress Alla Nazimova, who brings Valentino into the realm of the "art movie" by casting him as her Armand in *Camille*, and Natacha Rambova, who masquerades as a Russian and tries to rule Valentino's career, do nothing but posture. Both, as Russell tells, it, are snooty, artsy-fartsy fakes, though a storyboard which they devise with Valentino looks like some shots in Gomez's book that were cut from American prints of *The Boy Friend*. Nazimova flounces up to Rudy's bier, hamming tattered passions, doing retakes of her faints for the press. Juxtaposing her and Rambova to banks of flowers in the funeral parlor, Russell does try for a mood of loss and waste; but his screechy caricatures cannot suddenly brim with sensitivity, and he finally sends them out together in lesbian togetherness to the "Wedding March." None of this lampooning would be excessive if it were confined to Nazimova; Leslie Caron does flutter amusingly. But Russell redoubles it with Rambova, allowing her no allure and letting Michele Phillips murder the role. Hard, shrill, and butch, she reads her lines—especially that "bullshit"—with such amateur tonelessness that the illusion of period shrivels in all of her scenes.

Rambova could have been interesting if only Russell had picked up on the suggestiveness of her masquerade. The Russell of *Savage Messiah* and *Mahler* would surely have been fascinated by Winifred Shaunessy of Salt Lake City, born American but raised and schooled amid the cultural values of Europe, where she spent much of her youth. If anyone was ever split between the Old World and the New, it was Rambova-Shaunessy. Even the briefest biographical note on her suggests Preston Sturges, with his hardnosed American father and aesthetic European mother, his ambivalence toward the values of each (as analyzed by James Agee and Manny Farber). Entranced by movies, Rambova wanted to make some her own way. But Hollywood, which absorbed plenty of pretentious European males, would not back a pretentious ersatz-European woman. She made Valentino her passport yet so alienated people with her temperment that United Artists forcibly excluded her from any role in its Valentino movies, as Russell

VALENTINO

shows. But he ridicules her suffering over this exclusion, although it does not seem much different from Alma Mahler's pain when her songs are rejected. And even at their most inane, Rambova's pretenses seem no more outré than those of Sophie Brzeska, who does, after all, work on something called "Truth, a Novel of the Spirit" in *Savage Messiah.*

Russell's unwillingness to extend Rambova any sympathy seems rooted in anti-Americanism, and this confuses the movie's main theme: the sexual ambiguity in Valentino's appeal and the response of his fans. Through Nureyev, he continually stresses Valentino's swarthy, slightly overripe looks, contrasting them with the foursquare sunniness of Wallace Reid and the glibly grinning newsmen who hound him. He invents an encounter with Nijinsky so that the two men can dance a sensuous tango which goads Rudy's lady boss, in true American fashion, to call him a fairy. The slur keeps popping up, as Valentino's slumbrous, pomaded glamor boys make him a star. Russell brings in the Chicago *Tribune's* vicious "Powder Puff" editorial, which raged against this degeneracy, even demanding to know "why didn't someone quietly drown Rudolpho Guglielmi, alias Valentino, years ago?" Angered at the racial-sexual insult, Valentino issues a challenge which leads to a fight with another newspaperman, the ex-heavyweight champion of the Navy. According to one account, Valentino, a good amateur boxer, took a punch without wavering, then floored the pug with one jab. Russell embellishes the story: Valentino (whose boxing ability goes unmentioned) gets his brains beaten out for two rounds by the reporter (Peter Vaughan, the bearded villager of *Straw Dogs*), then comes from behind to bomb his opponent to the canvas, while moronic fans jeer when he's losing and cheer when he wins.

The sequence tries to freeze the cow-like numbness of the mass audience and the garishness of American manhood rites. But it's a no-win setup. If Valentino falls, we wallow in cheap pathos; if he triumphs, we wallow in movie clichés. Since Russell can't choose, he settles for both. After the bout, the reporter goads Rudy into a boozing contest. Rudy wins that, too, only to aggravate his ulcer condition and die a martyr to Yankee sexual bigotry. We can read all this to mean that Rudy, though utterly straight, radiates a soft, languid, "feminine" eroticism so threatening to American stud bulls that they must vilify him; he, in turn, can't defend himself except by their rules, and this destroys him. But Russell's disdain for Valentino's acting, which projects that eroticism to the public, and his voodoo doll portrait of Rambova, who looks like a boy in one seaside episode, makes us unsure of whether he is meant to be a gay or a slandered straight. Richard Shickel (*Time*, November 14, 1977) and Nureyev (*Rolling Stone*, November 3, 1977) call him gay, but the film is blurry on this point. The Nijinsky dance is sexy, but Rudy shows no desire for men. A starlet (played with marvellous exuberance by Penny Milford) rapes him between takes on *Monsieur Beaucaire* while gasping out a fantasy based on his sheik character; he just lies there while she does everything, but both have pussycat smiles when they return to the set. Vague innuendoes fly about his first wife, but she never appears. If, for instance, Valentino were shown to be a latent homosexual trying to deny his sexuality by beating the macho clods at their own games, the movie's climax might have been truly dramatic, instead of merely pathetic and spiteful. Russell used to explore the complexities of his characters. Now he turns them into dartboards; the Bay Guys throw darts at the Good Guys, and he throws them at both, scoring fewer and fewer bull's-eyes.

Has Russell burned himself out? He wouldn't be the first major film artist to do so. His kind of movie-making, which requires lavish effects for limited funds and continually calls down wrath on his head, must demand above-average reserves of professional discipline, determination, and defiance, which no one could maintain in equilibrium all the time. Both his favored subject matter and the baroque image he cultivates to help keep himself bankable may be hair triggers for grandiosity and egomania. The pressures may be telling on Russell, who more and more seems to be yielding to the desire to fling dead cats back at his Pollyanna critics. Even if speculation like this is totally wrong, Russell manifestly needs to regain touch with people, works, ideas, beliefs which command his allegiance. Otherwise, he is likely to become just a ringmaster of hyperthyroid camp circuses. Even then, he'd probably be entertaining. But for mere entertainment, who needs Ken Russell?

LUCY FISCHER

# *Enthusiasm:* From Kino-Eye to Radio-Eye

*. . . Listen!*
*The locomotives groan,*
*and a draft blows through crannies and floor;*
*"Give us coal from the Don!*
*Metal workers*
*and mechanics for the depot!*
*At each river's outlet, steamers*
*with an aching hole in their side,*
*howl through the docks:*
*"Give us oil from Baku!"*
*While we dawdle and quarrel*
*in search of fundamental answers,*
*all things yell:*
*"give us new forms!"*

*There are no fools today*
*to crowd, open-mouthed, round a "maestro"*
*and await his pronouncement*
*Comrades,*
*give us a new form of art—*
*an art*
*that will pull the republic out of the mud.*

—Vladimir Mayakovsky
From: "Order No. 2 To The Army of Arts" (1921)[2]

The year 1930 would not seem to have been a very pleasant one for Dziga Vertov. On the political front it was a year that saw a hardening of the Stalinist regime and with it the aesthetic of Socialist Realism. (Vertov was radically opposed to this aesthetic.) On the technical front, it was a year that found Soviet cinema disoriented by the advent of sound and its film-makers conflicted as to its proper use. (Vertov was in the vanguard of this conflict). On the personal front, it was a year that saw Vertov's dismissal from VUFKU, the Pan-Ukrainian Committee of Cinema and Photography. (Vertov, of course, had been charged with the sin of formalism.) But 1930 was also the year in which Vertov made *Enthusiasm*, a film that it may be useful to see as the object upon which these other lines converge.

Earlier in 1930 Vertov had written a plan for the film, giving it the dual titles of *Symphony of the Donbas* or *Enthusiasm*. This plan described mainly the visual shots to be included in the film. But it is more interesting to note that during 1929[3] he had written another treatment for the film, one that was conceived almost totally in terms of sound. *Enthusiasm* was to be Vertov's (and, one of Russia's) first sound films, and his fascination with the new medium is apparent in his writing:

> A clock ticks. Quietly at first. Gradually louder. Still louder. Unbearably loud (almost like the blows of a hammer). Gradually softer, to a neutral, clearly audible level. As if the beating of a heart, only considerably louder.[4]

The fact that he could conceive of and describe in advance an independent sound track for the film is, in itself, extraordinary; but less so, when one considers the concerns of Vertov's youth. His academic background seems to have been quite broad. He studied music at a conservatory in Bialystok, and then attended medical school. While there, he pursued an interest that had been his since childhood—that of creative writing. After completing several novels, Vertov explains in his *Notebooks:*

> . . . all was transformed into a fascination with a montage of stenographic notes and sound recording—in particular a fascination with the possibilities of documenting sounds in writing, in attempts to depict in words and letters the sound of a waterfall, the noise of a sawmill, in musical-thematic creations of word montage . . .[5]

As historian Georges Sadoul makes clear in his work on Vertov, in such pursuits the latter was no doubt influenced by the Italian Futurist art movement, then concerned with the use of sound in general and industrial noise in particular. In 1911,

Bailla Pratella had written a "Manifesto to Futurist Musicians" in which he had called for the expression of "the musical soul of the masses, of great industrial timber yards, of trains, of transatlantic ships, of . . . the glorification of electricity."[6] In 1912, Marinetti had said that writers should "give the word" to objects and machines and introduce noise into literature. In 1913, painter Luigi Russolo had written:

> Let us travel together across a great modern capital, ears more attentive than eyes, and we will vary the pleasure of our sensibility in distinguishing the gurgling of water, of air, of gas in the metal pipes . . .[7]

As Sadoul points out,[8] the phrase "ears more attentive than eyes" seems certainly to have been a key one for Vertov. For in 1916 he set up a Laboratory of Hearing in which to conduct such Futurist-influenced sound experiments. Thus we find, strangely, that the film-maker most known for his concern with the *eye* was really, at first, most concerned with the *ear.* And one can see *Enthusiasm,* which Vertov himself referred to as "a symphony of noises," as an almost postponed event—one that he was somehow ready for in the twenties, but which was not, technologically speaking, ready for him.

But let us return to Vertov's sound scenario of 1929. Examining this along with the 1930 treatment of the visuals, we realize that we have what amounts to separate sound track and visual track conceptions for the film. One might read into this fact the notion that the sound track is primary. (After all, its plan did come first and seems to have been written with more care and detail.) But this may be unfair. What can certainly be inferred, however, is that Vertov intended to treat the sound and visual elements in the film as separate and *equal.* This general attitude toward sound had, of course, been called for by Eisenstein (and Pudovkin and Alexandrov) in 1928. Eisenstein feared that most of the first sound films would be those in which sound recording would "proceed on a naturalistic level, exactly corresponding with the movement on the screen . . . providing a certain *illusion* of talking people, of audible objects, etc."[9] This, he felt, would destroy montage and thus he called for sound to be treated as "a new montage element (as a factor divorced from the visual image.)" As a means of accomplishing the divorce of sound from picture, he proposed "its distinct non-synchronization with the visual images."

In 1930, Vertov made his own statement on the sound film, partly in reaction to that of Eisenstein:

> Declarations about the need to keep visual moments from coinciding with audible moments, just like declarations about the need to have only sound films or only talkies aren't worth a bean. In sound film, as in silent film, we distinguish only two kinds of films: documentary (with real conversations and sounds) and play-films (with artificially prepared conversations and sounds). Neither documentaries nor play films are obligated to have visible moments coincide [or not coincide] with audible moments. Sound shots and silent shots are edited alike; they can coincide [or not coincide] in montage or they can mix with each other in various combinations . . .[10]

Clearly, Vertov, like Eisenstein, is concerned with the integrity of the sound track, the creation of sound as well as visual montage. But his conception of this is perhaps more radical. He rejects Eisenstein's notion of achieving aural independence through a mere nonsynchronization of visual and auditory material, and, as we shall see in examining *Enthusiasm,* achieves it through concepts of editing and synchronization of a more subtle nature. But, more importantly, Vertov is also, like Eisenstein, wary of the sound film's potential for naturalistic illusion. However, he proceeds to interpret and subvert that illusionism in a fundamentally different manner.

*Enthusiasm* is, first of all, a documentary, which, on one level, is about the efforts of the Don Basin region to accomplish certain industrial-agricultural tasks of the First Five Year Plan. These tasks consist mainly of the mining of coal, the production of steel, and the harvesting of wheat (in that order). It is an ode to the cooperative enthusiasm of Soviet workers and a lesson concerning the interrelatedness of their various tasks in achieving State Socialism. What occurs in the Don Basin is a synecdoche for what is occurring in Russia at large. But *Enthusiasm* is obviously more than this. And perhaps an examination of the first section of the film (the only section which is, significantly, *not* about the Five Year Plan) will help to make the film's deeper meaning clear. For what is important about the first part of *Enthusiasm* is that, examined microcosmically, it can reveal to us the essential structures of the film

*Vertov's* ENTHUSIASM. *Together with such other significant Soviet films of the twenties as* A SIXTH OF THE WORLD, SALT FOR SVANETIA, *and* AELITA, *it will soon be placed in circulation by the Museum of Modern Art.*

in its entirety. It can reveal Vertov's theory of sound and how it relates to his conception of film in general.

What one is most struck by in the first section of *Enthusiasm* is the sense of incredible tension that exists between the sound and visuals. The sound physically pushes itself away from the screen; and the two seem related in the manner of magnets with like poles aligned—physically separate, but interacting through lines of force. Because of this dynamism, we are continually made aware of the sound track and visual track as separate entities. This, of course, arises from Vertov's highly experimental use of sound in the film. He studiously avoids the conventions already developed for the sound film in Britain and the United States (like synchronous dialogue, naturalistically related sound and image, and background "musak"), and instead employs the abstract and dissociative technique of audiovisual collage.

But before confronting the precise nature of that collage, it is useful to answer two questions: (1) *Why* does Vertov create this radical audiovisual disjunction: and (2) *How* does he accomplish it? One might conjecture, for example, that it is merely a virtuoso attempt to edit sound shots as flexibly as visual shots, and ascribe its disorienting use of sound montage to Vertov's earlier experience with Futurist experimentation. But this would be looking at the aesthetics of the film without regard to its political content.

The crucial thing to remember is that *Enthusiam* is a documentary, a film whose sound as well as visuals are documentary in nature. And if one examines briefly Vertov's theory of documentary (best known in the form of Kino- or Cinema-Eye) some puzzling aspects of the film fall into place. For Vertov's conception of Cinema-Eye applies exactly to his notion of Radio-Eye; what holds for his theory of cinematic visuals applies to his theory of cinematic sound as well.

To summarize, Vertov's first assumption politically is that the masses must be educated and conscious of the social, economic and political workings of the Soviet state:

> We need conscious men, not an unconscious mass. Submissive to any passing suggestion.[11]

His second assumption is that the average human being, with the normal human perceptual apparatus and limitations of time and space, is severely handicapped in his ability to be cognizant of these factors. The world is:

> . . . A whirlpool of contacts, blows, embraces, games, accidents, athletics, dances, taxes, spectacles, robberies, and incoming and outgoing papers, against a background of seething human labor.
>
> How is the ordinary unarmed eye to make sense of this visual chaos.[12]

His third assumption is that machines (for example, the camera and the sound recorder) have the capability that humans do not, to perceive life and, furthermore, to organize its chaos into a meaningful whole. This is due largely to their more perfect recording mechanisms and their powers of mobility:

> Slicing into the seeming chaos of life Kino-Eye attempts to find answers in life itself. To find the resultant force among the millions of phenomena related to any given subject.[13]

His use of the term "resultant force" gives us another clue, which is that Vertov regards the process of film-making as a *scientific* endeavor. His task is "to combine science with cinematic depiction in the struggle to reveal truth . . . to decipher reality."[14] This is important because just as the scientist's depiction of the world has nothing to do with the average man's *perception* of the world (e.g., I see the sun "rise" and "set" and do not see the turning of the earth on its axis), so Vertov's depiction of the world in cinematic terms, though documentary, will be far from isomorphic with our perception of it. His model is life as it exists independent of the human perceptor, not life as experienced by Man.

And finally, as Annette Michelson has stated in her seminal work on *The Man With the Movie Camera,*[15] Vertov in his radical concern with mass consciousness wants the viewer of his documentary films to be continually aware that he is watching a film. He wants to break the mesmeric spell of the cinema to insure its didactic powers. If the masses watch a play-film with even approved socialist content, they may be swayed by the powers of the medium, and its actors, and not persuaded, intellectually, by the truth of its arguments.[16] For Vertov the people must have knowledge and not belief; and to insure this, one must subvert the power of the cinematic illusion:

> For the Kinok demystification is equally important on the screen and in life.[17]

Thus, the use of sound in *Enthusiasm* is not just a virtuoso attempt at sound collage, art for art's sake. It is a radical attempt to break the naturalistic illusion of the sound medium.

> Long live the class consciousness of healthy men with eyes and ears to see and hear with.[18]

This is borne out by a close reading of the first section of the film in terms of both technique and content. For what is the subject of the first section of *Enthusiasm* if not the process of demystification itself? On the level of content, the film begins with images of Russia in the grips of hypnosis by Tsarism and religion. We are flooded with images that reconstruct the period: the Tsarist monogram, church bells, statues of Christ, genuflecting worshippers, crucifixes, etc. Counterpointed with these images are sounds of liturgical choirs singing, people intoning the mass, sacred music, cuckoos, and ticking clocks. Most sound-image relations fall under the category of asynchronicity, with the exception of the church bells which are simultaneously seen and heard.

Intercut with these images of religious and monarchal worship are images of staggering drunks. It is not difficult to interpret Vertov's statement; religion is, after all, the opiate of the people.

In the next sequence, Vertov centers on the process of demystification. The act of coming out of the political-religious trance is accomplished, symbolically, through the destruction of a church and its subsequent conversion into a public social club. In this very spectacular sequence, we see multiple prismatic images of the church spire appear on the screen and jump around. A split-screen image of the crucifix is seen with each cross bending toward the other as though falling. Other images of crucifixes vibrate and go round in a circle. The impact of the visuals is underscored and accentuated by the sound track, which consists of drum rolls that are carefully matched to the rhythm of the images.[19] Finally, we see the castrated church spire fall to the ground, accompanied by the large crash on the sound track. This is repeated several times in a dramatic climax to the sequence.

Ultimately, in a series of reverse shots accompanied by band music, we see socialist flags fly onto the front of the defrocked church and the inverse religious conversion is accomplished. Reli-

gion is seen and heard for what it is and eliminated. "The perfumed veil of kisses, murders, doves and prestigidation" is lifted.[20] The people are finally conscious. The red star flies up and magically the church is transformed; and magic is, perhaps, the point. For only the Cinema Eye/Ear can see and hear in this extraordinary way—can straddle time and space, uniting visually and aurally events that to the average person are unrelated ( . . . "freed from time and space, I coordinate any and all points of the universe wherever I may plot them."[21]) And it is also the point in that Vertov continually makes sound and image so "tricky" that one is aware of the trick. He is like a magician who performs tricks only to reveal to us how they are done; only to instruct us against falling for tricks in the first place.[22]

The content of the first section of the film reveals something else as well. The very first visual shot is an ambiguous image of a young woman, who puts on headphones and sits in front of some kind of switchboard: (likely, the "radio-telegraph" mentioned in Vertov's sound scenario). It is an image that will continue to reappear and punctuate the section as a leit-motif. The woman is usually seen in the posture of listening; hence, the preponderance of close-up shots of her ears and earphones. It soon becomes clear that this woman serves the function of standing for the film *listener.* At one point, in fact, as she puts on her earphones the sound track carries the voice of a man shouting: "Attention. Attention. Leningrad speaking . . . RV3 . . . at a wavelength of 1,000 meters. We now broadcast the march, "The Final Sunday," from the film, *Symphony of the Donbas.*"[23] This is immediately followed by the image of a conductor leading an orchestra which is presumably playing the very music that she is listening to.

The woman serves essentially two functions. Within the context of the film she seems to play the role of sound "monitor," a member of the film production crew who audits the sound recording process.[24] On another level, however, she seems to stand outside the film, and in this capacity is identified with the film audience itself.

Clearly, the iconography of this preface to *Enthusiasm* reveals Vertov's commitment to cinematic reflexivity; to sabotaging all filmic illusions, in this case, those pertaining to the medium of sound. Just as in *Man with the Movie Camera* we are made aware of the Cinema-Eye, so in *Enthusiasm* (or, "Woman with the Earphones") we are forced to be conscious of the Cinema-Ear.

*Dziga Vertov*

The last time the radio-telegraph woman appears is during the final shots of this section, when demystification of religion is accomplished. Significantly, she is seen without earphones, sculpting a bust of Lenin.

There is also another aurally reflexive element in this introductory section: the orchestra conductor. Early on in the film we hear orchestral music accompanying certain images. But it is not until

many shots *later* that Vertov shows us this very music in the process of being conducted. It seems both an instance of audiovisual time reversal and an example of Vertov's desire to reveal the film-making process. It may also be an apologia for what is probably the only studio-recorded sound shot within the film.

Vertov had very rigid notions of the need for pure documentary footage. As an earlier quote reveals, for him the important distinction in the sound film was not between asynchronization and synchronization but between real and artificial conversations and sounds. One might ask, however, *why* the distinction is so important; why the bell sound used in the film could not have been recorded on a sound stage or created in a sound effects machine. But one need only examine Vertov's statement about the apple:

> If a fake apple and a real apple are filmed so that one cannot be distinguished from another on the screen, this is not ability, but incompetence—inability to photograph.[25]

And so it is with sound. But it also important to remember that Vertov considered himself a scientist and was concerned with using sound as *evidence.*[26] We can learn, for example, about the human body by seeing a plastic model of the skeletal system. But then we are only taking on faith that it corresponds to what is actually beneath the skin. However, if we dissect a cadaver and observe a real skeletal system we have evidence. And it is the same with film.

But how, specifically, on the level of sound technique, does Vertov help to break the aural cinematic illusion, the illusion that we are "there" listening, and remind us we are listening to a film? On the most general level he causes the viewer to feel profoundly disoriented in the sound space of the film. His means of achieving this are numerous and can be found in an examination of the first section of the film:

1. *Disembodied Sound:* During the shots of the radio-telegraph woman we intermittently hear on the sound track a clock ticking and a mechanical cuckoo. These sounds remain, however, disembodied and are never identified with anything depicted on the screen.

2. *Sound Superimposition (from various sound spaces):* At points in the first section of the film the clock ticking is heard "over" the church bells. Clearly the clock and bells are spatially unrelated.

3. *Sound/Visual Time Reversal:* The example of the orchestra conductor has already been cited.

4. *Abrupt Sound Breaks:* During the title sequence the Komsomol band music abruptly changes to cuckoo calls; and later a woodwind march is abruptly cut off by the loud tolling of a bell. The most extreme example of this occurs during a march sequence when the music is actually broken off three times for moments of silence, as though someone had lifted a needle off a record and placed it down again.

5. *Abrupt Tonal Contrasts:* This technique is similar to the one above. However instead of involving sound "breaks" it involves stark tonal contrasts (e.g., the cut from the light sound of a woodwind march to the heavy tolling of a church bell).

6. *Sound Edited to Create an Effect of Inappropriate Physical Connection to the Image:* The best example of this occurs before the destruction of the church. We see on the screen a succession of static images: a church spire, a madonna, a statue of Christ, a Tsarist monogram. Each one is accompanied on the sound track by the tolling of a bell. The feeling that arises from this particular coupling of sound and image is that the very same impact of the bell clapper that causes it to toll, also "causes" the image to appear on the screen. It is as though the bell could toll not only sounds but pictures.

7. *Synthetic Sound Collage:* At points in the film, the sound mixing becomes so synthetic that one is reminded of its artificiality, of its status as pure film sound. An example occurs during the section in which religion is exposed. Accompanying the images of icons and genuflecting worshippers are sounds of bleating horns, organ music, church bells, etc.

8. *Inappropriate Sounds:* The spire "crash," when listened to closely, seems to be the sound of an explosion.

9. *Mismatchings of Sound/Visual Distance:* Often the visuals are in medium shot or long shot while the sound is in close-up. For instance when the spire falls we are much farther away visually than we are aurally.

10. *Mismatchings of Sound/Visual Location:* At points it is clear that while a visual has been shot in exteriors, the sound to which it is linked has been shot in interiors. This pertains to the shot in which drunks seen out of doors are accompanied by liturgical music clearly recorded indoors.

11. *Metaphorical Use of Sound:* The cuckoo is used in an openly semantic way. Its superimposition over church bells "says" that religion is insane, or, perhaps, "for the birds." The ticking clock (which is not realistically cued) becomes, metaphorically, the mechanical pulse of the nation, its "heartbeat", as Vertov puts it in the sound scenario.

12. *Sound Distortion:* Vertov openly employs sound distortion in certain sections of church bell tolling. This, of course, has semantic implications as well, in alluding to the warped teachings of the church. As we hear the distorted chiming, however, we see on the screen the normal movement of the bell. Thus a further sound/image disjunction is established.

13. *Technological Reflexivity:* In the first section we have two shots of loudspeakers hung in the corners of the rooms. We also

have the commentator on the sound track mention the film, *The Symphony of the Donbas*. Furthermore, we have the presence of the radio-telegraph woman.

14. *Association of One Sound With Various Images:* Over the course of the film a single sound will be synchronized to a variety of images. This breaks the illusion that any particular image is the source of that sound; or that the sound and image synchronized were recorded at the same time or in the same space. An example of this technique is the sound of a strange, high-pitched whistle which at one point accompanies shots of the mines, and at another, shots of the steel foundry.

15. *Simple Asynchronism of Sound and Image:* Examples of this are the church choir sounds versus images of drunks; Komsomol march versus the image of a train; the tolling bell versus the image of Christ's statue.

Accompanying these techniques of aural reflexivity Vertov, of course, employs deconstructive visual strategies to reinforce our consciousness of film *qua* film. Perhaps his most general method involves a total liberation from a "realistic" mode of spatial presentation. The spaces of consecutive shots are almost never contiguous; and it is impossible ever to reconstruct the geography of the settings we are in. Vertov's framing of shots contributes to this disorientation. Almost all the images in this section are shot at an angle. The surfaces upon which people, buildings, and machines stand are framed so as to be almost never parallel to the horizontal axis of the screen. Since things are not positioned this way in our real life experience we are constantly reminded of the mediation of the Camera-Eye. A second related technique Vertov employs is to misframe a shot and then "correct" it. In one shot, for example, the image of a church appears askew. The camera then rotates until the image straightens out and is perpendicular to the bottom of the screen.

Superimpositions, prism shots, split-screen effects, reverse shots and decelerations are used quite lavishly. The last shot of the section contains an acceleration that makes clear Vertov's concern. We have on the screen a static image—that of the church which has been converted into a social club. Instead of shooting it at normal speed, however, Vertov has shot it so that it appears in accelerated motion. The church of course remains "still"; but clouds rush past it in fantastic pixilation. On a semantic level, Vertov is most likely aiming at a sense of the socialist state "rushing into the future." But on a formal level, by taking what is essentially a static shot and giving it synthetic acceleration, Vertov underscores the fact that the church exists within the space of a film. The introductory section also contains such visually reflexive elements as: a shot of the movie theatre; an image of a drunk who visibly "shoos" away the cameraman; and exaggerated camera movements that remind us of its mechanical presence (its "drunken" movement in following an inebriated man; its swinging movement in paralleling the ringing of a bell).

But to return to the issue of sound, in the industrial and agricultural sections of the film which follow, we find an extension of Vertov's technique of audio-visual editing. In our discussion of the opening sequence of the film we had noted how Vertov's use of a distorted church bell and cuckoo sounds, in addition to being aurally reflexive, had thematic relevance to his critique of Tsarist Russia. In the agricultural and industrial sections, Vertov elaborates on this *semantic* use of sound. In these sections, however, the major thematic emphasis has shifted from a critique of the Russia of the past, to a celebration of the Soviet state of the present. Specifically, Vertov wishes to delineate the *interrelatedness* of the various Donbas tasks which conjoin to fulfill the directives of the first Five Year Plan. Thus Vertov will employ a single sound (like that of the Internationale being sung) to unify such diverse images as a workers' meeting, a coal miner, and a train leaving for the Donbas. Furthermore, Vertov cuts fluidly, without transition, between sounds of one kind of Donbas activity and another: from the sound of a train bringing coal workers, to that of farmers singing in the field. This technique asserts the fundamental unity and connection between the various labor tasks. A similar semantic function can be ascribed to many of the asynchronous sound/image relations in the film. For example, the disembodied shouts of "Hurrah" which accompany the images of the coal miners are clearly meant to stand for the massive support of other Donbas workers. Thus throughout *Enthusiasm* the very techniques that Vertov utilizes to break the sound illusion serve simultaneously to advance the film's political and thematic content.

In addition to entailing the elaboration of these semantic strategies, the agricultural and industrial

sections do, of course, involve an extension of Vertov's reflexive aural techniques as well:

1. *Sound Acceleration:* At one point in the film the Komsomol music becomes accelerated in a manner possible only through varying the speed of the recorded sound track.

2. *Sound Reversal:* In the agricultural section involving a peasant dance, a man plays an accordion. The second time a musical theme is heard it has a strange quality and *seems* to have been mechanically reversed.

3. *Images of Soundmen:* In several shots of the film a soundman can literally be seen on the screen, recording. One such shot occurs in the agricultural section as the women are stacking hay. Clearly, this reminds the viewer of the sound recording process and parallels the presence of the cinematographer in *Man with a Movie Camera.*

But what is *most* astonishing when one considers the complexity of audiovisual editing in *Enthusiam* are the production circumstances under which it was made. For as Vertov himself suggested, we must not merely judge *Enthusiasm* in an absolute or general sense "(outside of time and space)" but rather appreciate it "in relation to the given state of the development of the sound cinema."[27]

The Soviets were, of course, late in obtaining sound technology because it was not a crucial aspect of the first Five Year Plan.[28] Also, it was legislated that all materials for sound equipment should be made in Russia's own workshops and foundries, rather than imported from capitalist countries. Thus it was not until 1928–1929 that Shorin and Tager's sound systems were demonstrated.

The development of portable and open-air equipment presented additional problems; and it was not until August 1929 that Tager and Obolensky tested an open-air system in the streets of Moscow.[29] Since Vertov's concern in *Enthusiasm* was with documentary, rather than studio, sound, such equipment was mandatory for on-location shooting, and he had to await its development. In an article written by Vertov in 1931, after the film's completion, he recounts the difficult process involved in producing the apparatus for his project:

> The urgent manufacture of a mobile sound-recording installation was made the main question of the day. Comrades Timartsev, Tchibissov, Kharitonov and Moltchanov, collaborators in the laboratory of Professor Shorin, worked day and night to assemble the installation. During the course of April we proceeded with the first attempts at shooting. Next we filmed May Day, then the port of Leningrad and finally, after the apparatus had undergone some modifications, we left for Kharkov to film the Eleventh Congress of the Ukrainian Party. After filming the Congress, the apparatus was again modified and we left for the Donbas.[30]

Thus, *Enthusiasm* was a pioneer work in the development of on-location sound technique; (Vertov called it an "icebreaker . . . of sound-film documentaries"[31]). As such it provided concrete evidence for the possibility of documentary sound and countered a then-prevailing theory, advanced by sound engineer Ippolit Sokolov, that all film sound required studio post-synchronization.[32] *Enthusiasm,* however, proved otherwise and realized Vertov's desire to "move over from the velvet coffin of the soundless studio and plunge into the terrible thunder and iron clanging of the Donbas."[33]

In addition to pioneering the use of mobile recording equipment, Vertov and his crew experimented with other aspects of audiovisual registration. According to Vertov's "Report to the First Conference of the Workers of Sound Film"[34] his collaborators tested three modes of recording. First they took the picture and sound at different times on different negatives; second, they took the picture and sound synchronously on different negatives; third, they took both picture and sound synchronously on the same negative. From these tests they concluded that the final method provided the highest quality visual and aural material.

But the optimal procedure for recording sound and image led to difficulties and challenges in the editing process. For Vertov was severely hampered by the lack of sophisticated sound-editing machinery. As he explains it:

> We had at our disposal neither a sound-editing table nor the least apparatus for organizing sound and visual cine-material . . . nevertheless we did not follow the line of least resistance, we did not exploit the favorable fact that we were provided in the Donbas with a mobile installation and that consequently the majority of sounds were recorded on the same strip as the image. We were not content to simply have the sound and image coincide and we followed the line which, in our situation, was that of maximum resistance, that of the complex interactions of sound and image.[35]

Curiously, the few instances in which sound and image do simply coincide in *Enthusiasm* (e.g., the workers' speeches) are experienced by the audience as a kind of unexpected shock. Which

reminds us that what Vertov has created in *Enthusiasm* is a work in which sound almost never seems to issue from the screen. Most sound films create for us a certain illusion: we see on the screen the image of a man starting a car, and hear, simultaneously, on the sound track, a noise that is appropriate to it in terms of content and aural quality. The two merge, overlap perfectly and seem united. This unity in a sense places the spectator perceptually within the space of the film; he experiences the scene as though he were "there." By breaking this unity (by having sound and image to some degree "repel" each other) Vertov leaves him forever within the space of the theater. It seems probable that this disjunction was what Vertov hoped to insure in his operation of the sound system during the London screening of the film:

> When Vertov attended the presentation of his first sound film, *Enthusiasm*, to the Film Society of London on November 15, 1931, he insisted on controlling the sound projection. During the rehearsal he kept it at normal level, but at the performance, flanked on either side by the sound manager of the Tivoli Theatre and an officer of the Society, he raised the volume at climaxes to an ear-splitting level. Begged to desist he refused and finished the performance fighting for possession of the instrument of control . . .[36]

Vertov intended for us not to be referred to the space of the film, but rather to the space of the outside world. This statement may seem confusing and paradoxical in that *Enthusiasm* in no way seems to replicate our impression of reality. In its radical disruption of the cinematic illusion, in its insistence on documentary evidence, it seems to us less real, less documentary than even most fiction films.

But this is not paradoxical if one recalls that for Vertov the notion of documentary in no way implied a document of the human experience of the world, one confined by an imperfect biological perceptual apparatus and bodily limitations of time and space. For Vertov, his films were a document of a world unmediated by normal human perception. "My road," he said, "is to a fresh perception of the world."[37]

The purpose of this liberation from human experience (and thus the rationale for a complexity of technique) was to afford the viewer a conceptual knowledge unavailable to him in his normal perceptual stance, to allow him to "decipher in a new way the world unknown to him."[38]

Vertov said: "Truth is our object. All our devices, modes and genres are means. The ways are various but the end must be one—truth."[39] But his critics misunderstood. Ignoring his intent, they chastised his means. His artistic virtuosity was gratuitous, his technique, formalistic. Vertov was forced to leave VUFKU. But all this was not happening in a vacuum. It was occurring against the backdrop of certain political and artistic developments. A new aesthetic policy was taking over. According to Dickinson and de la Roche:

> The new policy, known as socialist realism, aimed at a *simple* naturalism and adventures in individual virtuosity were considered unnecessary *if the subject could explain itself in plain statement.* (Italics mine)[40]

But for Vertov the subject could never explain itself in plain statement. And a simple naturalism could mystify, entice, and entertain the viewer, but could never provide him with evidence for knowledge about the real world. Finally, for Vertov the paradox lay not within the structure of his films, but within the fact that although truth itself be simple, "it is far from simple to show the truth."[41]

## NOTES

1. Vertov seems alternately to have used the term "Radio-Ear" and "Radio-Eye" in relation to his conception of the sound film. In a statement of 1925, for example, he uses "Radio-Ear" to describe, specifically, the *sound track* of a film and talks of establishing "a visual class bond (Kino-Eye) and an auditory bond (Radio-Ear) between the proletariat of all nations . . ." (*Articles. Journaux. Projets.* trans. by Sylvanie Mossé and Andrée Robel. (Paris: *Cahiers du Cinéma.* 1972), p. 74. (My translation.) In a statement of 1929 (Ibid., p. 133) Vertov seems to use the term "Radio-Eye" to mean *sound film* (i.e., sound plus image). Thus he talks of the Kinoks Radioks having moved from Kino-Eye to Radio-Eye "that is to say, to the audible, radio-diffused Kino-Eye." It is because the term "Radio-Eye" seems to be more inclusive and appears in the later writings that it is used in this paper.

2. Vladimir Mayakovsky, "Order No. 2 to the Army of Arts" (Trans. by Max Hayward and George Reavey) in Patricia Blake (ed.), *The Bedbug and Selected Poetry* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1960), p. 147-148.

3. The dates for the sound and visual scenarios for *Enthusiasm* come from the German edition of Vertov's writings: *Dsiga Wertow: Aufsätze, Tagebücher, Skizzen.* Edited by Hermann Herlinghaus with the collaboration of Rolf Liebmann. (Berlin:

Institut für Filmwissenschaft and der Deutschen Hochschule fur Filmkunst, 1967), p. 314ff.
4. P. 282 of Vertov's collected works in Russian. From the forthcoming Vertov volume edited by Annette Michelson and translated by Kevin O'Brien.
5. Dziga Vertov, "The Writings of Dziga Vertov, trans. by S. Brody, in P. Adams Sitney (ed.), *Film Culture Reader* (New York: Praeger, 1970), pp. 361-362.
6. Georges Sadoul, "Dziga Vertov," *Cahiers du Cinéma,* (May/June 1970), p. 19. (My translation.) The material in this article is also contained in Sadoul's book on Vertov: *Dziga Vertov.* (Paris: Editions Champs Libre, 1971).
7. Ibid., p. 21.
8. Ibid.
9. Sergei Eisenstein, *Film Form,* trans. by Jay Leyda, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1949), p. 258. (Italics mine.) The next two quotes by Eisenstein are taken from the same text, pp. 258-259.
10. Dziga Vertov, "The Vertov Papers," trans. by Marco Carynnyk, *Film Comment,* (Spring 1972) p. 50. (The material within the brackets is my own additional translation of material taken from "Responses à des Questions" in *Cahiers du Cinéma,* (May/June 1970), p. 16.)
11. Dziga Vertov quoted in Annette Michelson, *"The Man with the Movie Camera:* From Magician to Epistemologist," *Artforum* (March 1972), p. 66.
12. Dziga Vertov, "The Vertov Papers," op. cit., p. 46.
13. Ibid., p. 48.
14. Dziga Vertov, "The Writings of Dziga Vertov," op. cit., p. 362.
15. This concept of subverting the cinematic illusion is a central point in Michelson's article.
16. It would be interesting here to contrast the didactic means of a play-film (like Eisenstein's *The Old and the New*) with those of *Enthusiasm.*
17. *Dziga Vertov, "From the Notebooks of Dziga Vertov,"* trans. by Marco Carynnyk, Artforum (March 1972), p. 75.
18. Dziga Vertov quoted in Michelson, op. cit., p. 66.
19. My description of these sequences is taken from a print of *Enthusiasm* that has been restored by Peter Kubelka and is shown in repertory at Anthology Film Archives in New York City. The Museum of Modern Art has the Gosfilmofond version which formed the starting point for Kubelka's restoration.
20. Dziga Vertov, quoted in Michelson, op. cit., p. 66.
21. Dziga Vertov, "The Writings of Dziga Vertov," op. cit., p. 359.
22. Michelson's notion of Vertov's movement "from magician to epistemologist" is central here.
23. From the translation of the film's titles by Kevin O'Brien for Anthology Film Archives.
24. There may be some support for seeing the radio-telegraph woman as standing for a sound monitor in that, according to Jay Leyda in *Kino* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1960, p. 282) part of *Enthusiasm* was recorded on a non-portable sound system that was hooked up to a Radio-Centre.
25. Dziga Vertov, "The Writings of Dziga Vertov," op. cit., pp. 368-369.
26. See Annette Michelson's use of the term, op. cit., p. 64.
27. Dziga Vertov, *Articles, Journaux, Projets,* op. cit., pp. 155-156. (My translation.)
28. Jay Leyda, op. cit., Chapter XIII.
29. Ibid., p. 279.
30. Dziga Vertov, *Articles Journaux, Projets,* op. cit., p. 152 (My translation.)
31. Ibid., p. 153. (My translation from the French).
32. Ibid., p. 156. (My translation from the French).
33. Dziga Vertov, "Report to the 1st Conference of the Workers of Sound Film," (delivered in the summer of 1931). According to Vlada Petric, the manuscript of this Report is kept in the Herbert Marshall Archive, Center for Soviet and East European Studies, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale. I wish to thank Vlada Petric for bringing this Report to my attention and for his translations of passages from it.
34. Ibid. (My description of Vertov's methodology is based on Petric's paraphrase of portions of the Report).
35. Dziga Vertov, *Articles, Journaux, Projets,* op. cit., pp. 154-155. (My translation.)
36. Jay Leyda, op. cit., p. 282.
37. Dziga Vertov, "The Writings of Dziga Vertov," op. cit., p. 359.
38. Ibid.
39. Dziga Vertov, "From the Notebooks of Dziga Vertov," op. cit., p. 81.
40. Thorold Dickinson and Catherine de la Roche, *Soviet Cinema* (London: Falcon Press, 1948), p. 27.
41. Dziga Vertov, "The Writings of Dziga Vertov," op. cit., p. 365.

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CORRECTION: In our last issue, some of the stills in the Herzog article were *not,* as credited, by author Gideon Bachmann.

Institut für Filmwissenschaft and der Deutschen Hochschule fur Filmkunst, 1967), p. 314ff.
4. P. 282 of Vertov's collected works in Russian. From the forthcoming Vertov volume edited by Annette Michelson and translated by Kevin O'Brien.
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28. Jay Leyda, op. cit., Chapter XIII.
29. Ibid., p. 279.
30. Dziga Vertov, *Articles Journaux, Projets,* op. cit., p. 152 (My translation.)
31. Ibid., p. 153. (My translation from the French).
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33. Dziga Vertov, "Report to the 1st Conference of the Workers of Sound Film," (delivered in the summer of 1931). According to Vlada Petric, the manuscript of this Report is kept in the Herbert Marshall Archive, Center for Soviet and East European Studies, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale. I wish to thank Vlada Petric for bringing this Report to my attention and for his translations of passages from it.
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38. Ibid.
39. Dziga Vertov, "From the Notebooks of Dziga Vertov," op. cit., p. 81.
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# RESTORING *ENTHUSIASM*
## Excerpts from an interview with Peter Kubelka

**LUCY FISCHER:** I wanted to ask you some questions about your re-editing of ***Enthusiasm***. Can you tell me when you first saw the film?

**Peter Kubelka:** First I want to say that you used the word "re-editing"; but it's not really a re-editing; it's just a restoration. I only corrected the relation between sound track and image so as to bring it back to the original state. I have already noticed that some people speak of a Peter Kubelka "version," but I don't want that. I only tried to come as close to the original as possible. I first saw ***Enthusiasm*** at the Yugoslavian Film Archive. Mr. Achimowitz, who is one of the curators there, and likes Vertov very much, told me that I should see it. He said that I should only see the first reel of the film because the rest was not so good. That, interestingly enough, corresponds to the fact that the rest of the film was more out of synch than the first reel. This was in 1965 or 1966: and, of course, I was very impressed by the film.

**LF:** Were you immediately aware of the fact that the film needed restoration and interested in undertaking such a project? Or was there a time lapse?

**PK:** There was a big time lapse. I only saw the first reel at this time: I saw the rest of ***Enthusiasm*** in 1967 when the Austrian Film Museum had its first Vertov restrospective.

I realized then that the rest of the film was out of sync. Also, there were whole passages where I always fell asleep, which is a strange thing to do in a Vertov film. When I restored the film I found out that these sequences had real articulations which come out only by the sync events.

**LF:** To which sections are you referring?

**PK:** There is a sequence when the Plan comes into the film and you have this display model going around and around. Then also, the industrial sequence where there are many lorries going. But this is now one of the most exciting sequences because here Vertov worked in an absolute sync event articulation. He especially worked in this sequence with the specific sound of certain machines and the sound appears exactly when the machine appears. When the camera changes the visual field, the sound changes also.

This sequence is now completely in synch. It was, however, most difficult to find because previously it was completely out of sync. In the original version you saw this huge sledge hammer (moved by three people) come down in close-up. Knowing the grammar of Vertov it was impossible that there was no sound with that image. It could have been a purposeful silence; but the sledge hammer could not have just come down without any relation to the sound track. This sequence was very difficult to work on because here the sound was out of sync by more than 300 frames and visually there were more hits of the hammer than I had sound.

**LF:** Did Vertov synchronize silence with one of the sledge hammer hits?

**PK:** Not silence, words. And this is one of the finest grammatical achievements of Vertov in film. He starts by introducing a strong rhythmic accent; when the ham-

*The sledgehammer sequence (see text above)*

mer comes down . . . BOOM! You hear a strong sound, so that you get used to this accent. After some time the hammer comes down and when the hammer hits the object you don't hear natural sound anymore, you hear a word, a passionate call.

This brings us to how I did the restoration. I did it without any written or other references. I did it only on the basis that I was a film-maker who understood Vertov's way of composing.

**LF:** On a technical level, how did you proceed?

**PK:** What we began with was a normal positive, composite print with sound from Gosfilmofond's negative in Moscow. We separated it, which means we made an image negative and a sound negative. We also made a sound track on magnetic perforated tape. But then I did not work with the tape. The optical sound permits you also to ***see*** the sound writing and you can see if the original flow of sound signals is maintained or if there has been a cut. You see every cut. Then when I analyzed the sound track I found out how the cuts that Vertov himself had made looked. And then I found out how later restoration cuts looked, or how cuts that projectionists who had ruined the print looked. Which means that the print on which I worked was not made from the original negative; but, apparently, was made from a negative which had been made from a print.

Of course, Gosfilmofond had searched for the best print available but the print had gone through several stages of destruction and restoration—at least one stage of very bad restoration, namely a cosmetic restoration where the people who had restored it had cut away edges of the sound or of the image in order to make it fit.

And there was a restoration phase where black leader had already been put in to make up for missing elements in the image. Anyway, in spite of the black leader, all the places where there were lip sync were out of sync in the old versions. So this was the state in which I found the film. When I started to work with the separated image and sound I only realized how the film was gaining in brilliance and precision and it really changed completely. In the first reel, for example, it was out of sync only by a few frames and you still got, more or less, what was meant. But the ***start*** of the sync was always ruined. But when it's really in sync, it comes "Bang!" and immediately works and that's very different. You remember in the first reel, there are images of bells and then crosses which are faded out, one-two-three. In the restored version you have rhythmic accents on everything and in the other version you did not.

**LF:** How did you correct for the lack of precise synchronization?

**PK:** The working process was that I had the image work print and then the optical sound, and I tried to find the right place and went forward and backward and adjusted it until I found the right place. Again, to defend myself, I do not want people to view this as ***my*** version. What I did was really just to find out how it originally was and I did not cut one single frame, either from the sound or from the image. When the image was too long, I put silent leader in the sound to make it match again. When the sound was too long I put black leader in the image. So nothing is lost. I must point out very strongly that this is not a restoration like those of the 19th century, when they restored paintings by painting things in to make it look like the original. This is not what I did. I did not make a cosmetic restoration. It can be undone anytime and it will be in the state in which I found it.

**LF:** How close to the original do you believe that your restored version comes?

**PK:** There remain some places in the film where I am still not sure if it's in the right sync. And they occur near the Plan sequence. There are some moments which are not up to the level with which I would credit Vertov; and I was not able to find a more convincing relation between sound and image than the one that was there. But I would say that the film is now 90% in synch and there were differences in sync from between two or three frames to more than 300 frames.

You know, Vertov had to change the title of the film from ***Enthusiasm*** to ***Symphony of the Donbas.*** But the real title is ***Enthusiasm.*** This is what he wanted. Now that the film is restored this is what you really feel. You can feel this drive, this enthusiasm. You can feel that and you did not feel that before.

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Contributors, continued

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NOËL CARROLL

# Mind, Medium and Metaphor in Harry Smith's Heaven and Earth Magic

A work of art often implicitly offers a definition—and sometimes a redefinition—of its medium: through the way in which its materials are manipulated, it reveals presuppositions about the kind of object it should be understood to be. For an example from early film, Georges Méliès treats cinema as an analogue to theater, using the frame as a proscenium arch, and employing the full paraphernalia of nineteenth-century theatrical apparatus in his magical feats. Méliès's conception of film as theater made possible the kinds of films he made, and prevented him from conceiving others.

Harry Smith's film no. 12, called *Heaven and Earth Magic*, is a work where a quite different vision of the nature of the cinematic medium performs a constitutive function in the organization of the whole film. No. 12 has a story of sorts. According to Smith,

> The first part depicts the heroine's toothache consequent to the loss of a very valuable watermelon, her dentristry and transportation to heaven. Next the film follows an elaborate exposition of the heavenly land in terms of Israel, Montreal, and the second part depicts the return to earth from being eaten by Max Muller on the day that Edward the Seventh dedicated the Great Sewer of London.[1]

This humorous and evasive description has been rendered less obscure through the admirable research of P. Adams Sitney. *Heaven and Earth Magic* is a work of painstaking animation; many of the figures in the animation were garnered from a nineteenth-century periodical that was published on the day that Edward the Seventh dedicated the Great Sewer of London.[2]

In terms of the narrative, a woman, after chasing a dog that stole her watermelon, goes to the dentist where, under the influence of a powerful anesthetic, she experiences a series of oneiric fantasies. These fantasies were often inspired through Smith's reading of the Canadian neurophysiologist Penfield (hence, the reference to Montreal), and of the Kabala (the reference to Israel).[3] The anesthetic wears off (this is the descent to earth). Despite this rudimentary story line, Smith's creative energies are not devoted to the development of the narrative. Rather the narrative serves as pretext for the almost autonomous proliferation of imagery—a rapid, energetic succession following its own principles. These principles derive from a conception of cinema not based on narrative models like the epic poem, or the short story, or the novel: they model cinema on the mind.

I mean that the simile of cinema as mind provides a context in which the imagery of *Heaven and Earth Magic* becomes intelligible. On the most immediate level, the film employs everyday metaphors about states of consciousness as sources of imagery. For example, we often describe the state of reverie in terms of images floating into consciousness. In *Heaven and Earth Magic*, this phenomenological metaphor is embodied in a number of ways. Items descend at a stately place from the top of the frame in defiance of the laws of gravity. Also, the image of floating is mined by the use of the sound of lapping water on the aural track, sometimes suggesting that on-screen objects are suspended in a liquid solution.

The popular tendency to anthropomorphize faculties of the mind is literalized. The film is dominated by the figure of a little man, a miniature gymnast, who seems to direct much of the action. He is a sort of executive homunculus, a personalized mental faculty, a little man within the mind who makes it work.

The psychological arcana of the drug world is also apparent. The woman's consciousness literally "expands"—her head gets larger after she is injected. Drugs purportedly strip away our ego disguises; as her head explodes, a mask flies out. The idea that a drugged state induces a "high" is embodied in the upward heavenly movement of the imagery; as the drug wears off, the heroine not only comes "down," she "crashes"—her landing accompanied by a smash-up on the sound track. The befuddlement of the sense of time under drugs is suggested by images of floating clocks. And, on the sound track, clocks with different cadences count out time at different intervals, suggesting in a symbolic way the possibility of divergent experiences of time.

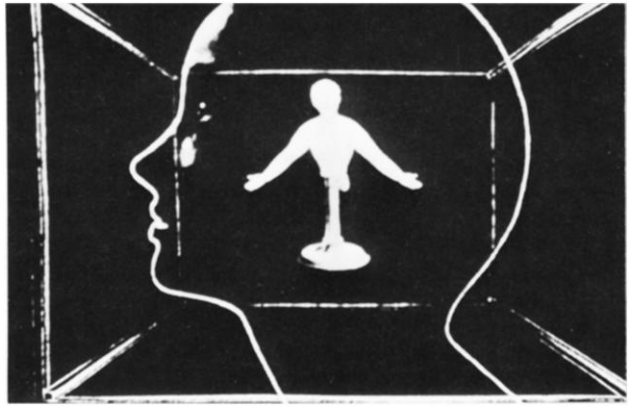
This generally humorous mimesis of the drug experience doubtless derives from Smith's documented use of drugs. This concern extends to much of the imagery of *Heaven and Earth Magic.* Repeatedly, Smith searches for images of the experience of the ego under drugs. In some cases the border between inside and outside becomes ill-defined—there are images where a stomach is attached to an arm. There are constant references to the fragmentation of the self through visual images of persons splitting apart, through visions of dismemberment, and through aural images of glass shattering and splintering. These motifs serve as literalizations of the everyday clichéd expressions of the "breakdown" of the ego.

Apparently, Smith originally wanted to carry even further the notion of the ambiguity of the border between self and other, under drugs, by designing a special theater for the film in which spectators would sit in seats that repeated the recurring objects of the film. Ensconced in upholstered watermelons and eggs, the visual differentiation between screen and auditorium would be slightly less complete than usual, that incompleteness serving as a symbol of the unsteady boundary of the ego under stress by means of continuing the motif of the blending of supposed contraries (i.e., internal is to external as screen is to audience).

But *Heaven and Earth Magic* ultimately is involved with more than the mimesis of states of consciousness. Rather the film presents itself as an image, or better, as a set of images of consciousness, of the mind itself. This is made explicit in the iconography of the film during the ascent of the heroine to heaven. The dentist's chair transforms itself into the outline of a head. The head, in turn, is inscribed in a box, the very sort of image that John Locke evokes when he analogizes the mind to a cabinet, [4] a closet, a dark room, and a *camera obscura.* [5] Two standard images of the mind, the head and the box, encompass the action, functioning as two frames within the cinematic frame, and thereby suggesting that the third frame in the rhyme, the cinematic frame, is to be understood on a par with the head and the box as yet another figure for the mind. Here the frame is demonstrably proposed as a correlate to consciousness. The rest of the film, as well as what went before, is devoted implicitly to deepening this explicit metaphor.

Of course, to analyze *Heaven and Earth Magic* as a metaphor of cinema as mind involves a number of complexities, not the least of which is the fact that "the mind," itself, is an elusive term, indeed one that we often attempt to characterize by means of metaphors like the *tabula rasa* or the spotlight. Coleridge thought of it as a vegetable,[6] to mention an eccentric case. Cinema, itself, has even served as a figure of consciousness—questioning the empiricist concept of the mind as a darkened room, the late Aron Gurwitsch wrote: "Hume expressly likens consciousness to a theater, but it is so to speak a theater without a stage. In modern terminology, one could compare consciousness with a perpetual succession of kinematographic pictures . . . "[7] Thus, in discussing the cinema/mind analogy we are in a thick soup where metaphors play on metaphors, sometimes doubling back on themselves. Yet, it is important to note that it is the very fact that the mind is often thought of in metaphors, indeed most often in terms of concrete visual metaphors, that allows Smith to propose and to develop the identification of cinema with thought.

This is not to say that in the course of *Heaven and Earth Magic* that Smith evolves a consistent, original philosophy of mind. Rather, the film is a series of poses, identifying with this or that metaphor of mind, trying on different and not always evidently harmonious images of thought as the basis for the genesis of imagery. The screen is a



mindscape; sometimes it is the mind as darkened room, and sometimes it is the mind as machine. The coherence of the film is not derived via a consistent perspective on the nature of thought, but instead coherence emerges through the succession of imagery that proposes different images of the mind, though not manifestly reconcilable ones. *Heaven and Earth Magic* interests us for aesthetic, not philosophic, reasons; it evokes the sense of an organic totality unified by the theme of mental metaphors.

One source of the mental metaphors in *Heaven and Earth Magic* is the language of British empiricists. The initial contents of the film are introduced by being emptied from Egyptian mummy cases. This is reminiscent of Locke's idea of the mind as a cabinet or closet, full of simple impressions of perception. In Hume's *The Treatise on Human Nature,* it is held that " . . . what we call a mind is nothing but a heap or collection of different perceptions united together by certain relations. . . . "[8] The notion of the heap, of course, occurs vividly toward the end of the film when the heroine's descent is marked by a pile of disparate objects, the details of her fantasy, crashing in front of a carnival arcade.

The notion of a person as a bundle[9] of perceptions is evoked in the beginning of the film when the heroine appears as a package with a head. That self-identity is nothing more than a congeries of percepts is proposed visually when, in an introductory scene, a woman is created through the metamorphosis of a pile of objects including a barrel, a valise, a hatbox, and a handbag. Here it is important to emphasize that the objects of *Heaven and Earth Magic* are patently magazine cutouts; their rather stiff pictorial quality is unabashed, making them easy analogues to the empiricist's simple percepts and discrete sense-datums.

Throughout, the mind as collection is a dominant motif. The very dated quality of the imagery suggests some kind of antiquarian collection while the way in which the various items are juxtaposed on-screen often affords a kind of combination of elements that can only be described fittingly by as neutral a word as "collection." Locke's metaphor of the train of ideas,[10] Hume's of ideas gliding across a stage,[11] as well as the common empiricist metaphor of the stream or torrent of consciousness, all emphasize a phenomenological experience of thought as a partially ungovernable succession of the discrete objects of sensation. Such a characterization correlates to the incessant, intrusive manner in which imagery invades the frame in *Heaven and Earth Magic.*

It is not my contention that in *Heaven and Earth Magic* Harry Smith has evolved an illustrated history of British empiricism. Many key empiricist metaphors, such as the *tabula rasa,* do not appear in the film. I am not even claiming that Smith acquired the empiricist metaphors from reading the empiricists; these metaphors are deeply embedded in our culture and are available without studying Locke and Hume. Smith has developed only a selection of the culturally available metaphors of mind, employing those chosen generatively; i.e., the heap, the closet, the flow of ideas each in turn serves either as a pretext for the appearance of a certain image or as a means of combining or organizing discrete images.

Empiricist conceptions of the mind also seem to influence Smith's imagery in terms of its mechanical motifs. At times, the insides of the heroine's head are portrayed as a set of spinning gears, with a jack hammer and other machine noises synchronized on the sound track. Of course, empiricism is allied with mechanism in a very specific way, because of its conception of the operations of thought in terms of the processes of the association of ideas. Associationism, the empiricist's vision of thinking as the combination, dismantling, and recombination of simple ideas, is at the root of the empiricist's identification with mechanism. Moreover, associationism also seems relevant to Smith's *Heaven and Earth Magic* because various categories of association seem to supply the best

descriptions of the step-by-step articulation of imagery in the film.

Classical associationism proposes the building up of complex and abstract ideas out of simple ideas or sensations. This sort of artisan's view of thought recurs in *Heaven and Earth Magic* through various repetitions of tools including pliers, a saw, a vise-grip, a mattock, an ax, and an engineer's hammer. These repeated elements suggest a theme of construction. The engineer's hammer is especially important because it is a major device for transforming one element of the heroine's fantasy into another. Either when in the hands of the miniature gymnast, the ringmaster of the film, or while floating free, the engineer's hammer need only touch an object, and, with an accompanying crash, the object metamorphoses completely.

The emphasis on a sense of the composite or of assemblage in associationist imagery is also in evidence in *Heaven and Earth Magic*. There are strange flying figures that stalk the heavenly realm. Sometimes birds, sometimes insects, they are made of cut-outs of shells, gears, wires and whatnot. They, like the assemblage of the cyclops in the first half of the film, remind one of the associationist claim that the fantastic beasts of mythology are recombinations of elements previously experienced in perception.[12]

The mechanical tone of associationism is captured in a number of ways. Often on the sound track there is the whirr of machinery. As well, an array of objects, putatively the kind of heap of perceptions that constitute the mind, spins around, and in the process becomes transformed into thirteen wheels, cogs in the mind machine. At another point, these machine gears turn so fast that they are transformed back into objects: a hammer, a fan, a gramophone, a dog, a hand, a skull, an enema, a bird, a light bulb, an urn, a mortar. Here, the transformation suggests that the machine image and the ensuing collection are in some way equivalent, perhaps two faces of the same view of the mind.

The mechanical metaphor of the mind is also developed by Smith through iconography that represents items of the heroine's fantasy being produced by a huge, mysterious machine. All sorts of entities are fed into the machine—fish, eggs, umbrellas. And out come effigies of the heroine—the machine of consciousness collating percepts into personal identities.

I have already emphasized that one does not encounter a consistent philosophy of mind in *Heaven and Earth Magic*. This is especially evident in Smith's use of associationism. For though he does employ several empiricist images of the mind, the type of associationism Smith favors is not empiricist but psychoanalytic. For Hume, simple ideas were related to each other in virtue of resemblance, continguity, or cause and effect. In *Heaven and Earth Magic*, typical cause and effect relations are often suspended. Instead of creating images generally in accordance with the "commonsense" empiricist schema, Smith, perhaps intuitively, relies more on the primary processes of the unconscious for the provenance of associations between his various images.

Harry Smith, himself, has pointed to his reliance on the psychoanalytic conception of free association in the organization of his imagery. He said

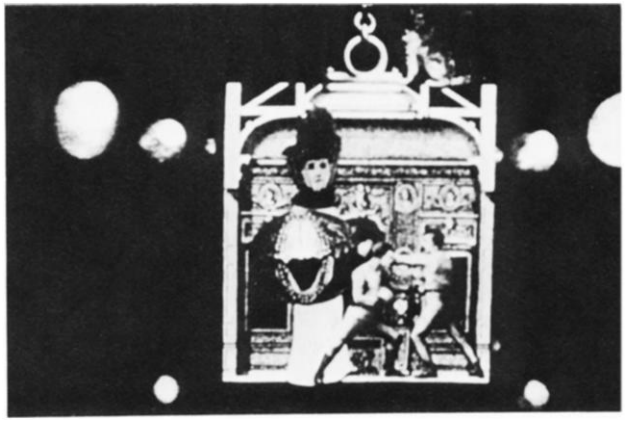
> I tried as much as possible to make the whole thing automatic rather than any kind of logical process. Though at this point Allen Ginsberg denies having said it, about the time I started making those films he told me that William Burroughs made a change in the Surrealist process—because, you know, all that stuff comes from the Surrealists—that business of folding a piece of paper: one person draws the head and then folds it over and somebody else draws the body. What do they call it? The Exquisite Corpse. Some one later, perhaps Burroughs, realized that there was some kind of what you might call God. It wasn't just chance. Some kind of universal process was directing these so-called arbitrary processes; and so I proceeded on that basis; try to remove things as much as possible from the consciousness or whatever you call it so that the manual processes could be employed entirely in moving things around. As much as I was able I made it automatic.[13]

Here the automatic process gives reign to the free association of the disparate objects of the film. Undoubtedly, Smith's penchant for free association is somewhat overdetermined. It derives not only from a surrealist concern with psychoanalysis, but also from Smith's preoccupations with the Kabala insofar as the psychoanalytic process of free association is akin to the Kabalistic form of meditation known as skipping, wherein one writes out a random set of letters or words, and then lets the eye jump from one to another, changing the original order in the hope that one of the recombinations will provoke the powerful insight. In

both skipping and free association, a play of juxtaposition is set in motion that unites disparate items in ways that defy straightforward rational ordering. As Smith suggests, there is a universal process at work. That process, of course, is the unconscious.

Throughout *Heaven and Earth Magic,* one detects the presence of unconscious processes operating in the association and organization of the disparate elements of the film. One such process is what Freud called condensation in his discussion of dreams.[14] An analogue to verbal metaphor, condensation is a visual means through which disparate elements come to be identified. Condensation functions by the construction of composite or collective images, through the construction of one object out of aspects of several different objects, thereby suggesting a relation of identity.

In *Heaven and Earth Magic,* the relationship between sound and image often seems to be primarily condensatory. Many of the transformations in the film are accompanied with the sound of a crash or a crack-up, yoking together or associating the aural event with the visual in a way that characterizes metamorphosis as a violent process, emphasizing the destructive component by identifying the process with mayhem. At one point in the film the gymnast is leaping from one pedestal to another until he comes to a place where a row of small couches continuously passes across his path to a larger couch. The smaller couches descend from the top of the frame at a steady pace. The sound cue changes several times. One moment it is the sound of wind, coloring one's perception of the image so that the space between the gymnast and the larger couch can be experienced as a gorge. Another moment the cue is moving water, projecting a sense of the moving objects as a river or a stream. Then the sound cue changes to honking horns, affording a view of the scene as a street full of traffic, each couch seen as a car. The effigies produced by what I earlier called the machine of consciousness are assembled while carnival noises play in the background, suggesting that these mannequin figures are shooting-gallery targets. Thus, disparate elements of sound and image are combined, yielding metaphoric identifications, though not all the identifications are as easily readable as these examples.



Another process of the unconscious mind that appears consistently in *Heaven and Earth Magic* is what Freud calls dramatization,[15] through which imagery is organized in such a way that it evokes a word or concept. For instance, Eisenstein explains to us that his motive in animating the stone lions in *Potemkin* was to literalize an old Russian epithet for indignation that describes appalling events as those with the power to make the very stones roar. We may presume that Eisenstein is a conscious master of this technique since we know he was familiar with Freud's *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious.*[16] Dramatizations recur throughout silent Eisenstein, especially in the first half of *October.* Indeed, as a film instructor, Eisenstein asked his students to find verbal solutions to the problem of visualizing scenes as he did when in *Potemkin* he transformed the notion of "flight" into the stone flight of the Odessa stairway.

As has already been suggested, *Heaven and Earth Magic* abounds with this sort of literalization. "Being high" and "crashing" are immediately accessible dramatizations. Likewise, the idea that the heroine's mind is in conflict during her descent from heaven is literalized through visual imagery of boxing and wrestling as well as through aural imagery of fight arenas with bells ringing and crowds shouting. That the heroine's experience is one where ideas and memories are "stirred up" is represented by the constant appearance of spoons (which also have drug connotations). This literalization would have been even more apparent in Smith's original plan for the film where Smith envisioned a scene in which "everyone gets thrown in a teacup which is made out of a head and stirred up."[17]

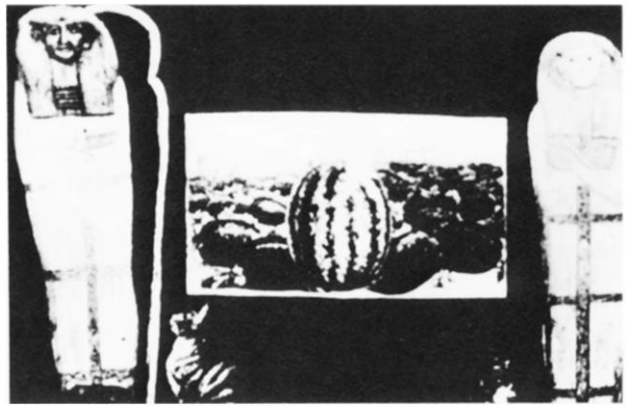
The important point is not simply that condensation and dramatization appear in *Heaven and Earth Magic.* These forms of symbolism function in many films, and not, for that matter, only in historically enshrined art films—popular sound films, as critics like Parker Tyler have often elucidated, are full of these forms of expression. Nevertheless, the way in which condensation and dramatization appear here is distinctive, for rather than being virtual figures of speech, as they are in Eisenstein's cinematic vocabulary, in *Heaven and Earth Magic* they are, as it were, the very subject matter of the film. This is borne out by the large number of vaguely decipherable condensations; it is difficult to say exactly what these expressive structures communicate, yet it is still possible to identify them as expressive structures, albeit ones that are often merely displayed rather than functioning. That is, often symbolic devices in the film are not experienced as vehicles conveying a legible subject matter, but instead they constitute the subject matter—they become the signified, not the signifiers, in contradistinction to their usual role in film.

Smith's version of baring the device aligns him with the surrealist project, because the types of signifiers revealed and displayed have psychic prototypes. Of course, the correlation between *Heaven and Earth Magic* and surrealism does not hinge simply on this single correspondence. Smith himself has made clear his attempt to transcribe the surrealist's use of automatism into cinematic practice. As well, the concern with extreme, wanton violence—a fantasy manifestation of the destructive power of the id—provides another common ground between Smith and surrealists. Also, there are iconographic congruities. In his use of nineteenth-century engraving and in conjoining objects of disparate scale, Smith recalls aspects of the work of Max Ernst. And the correlation of the work of art with the box of consciousness wherein memories are juxtaposed allusively suggests the elegiac collages of Joseph Cornell.

A surrealist film text, *Le Chien Andalou,* sheds light on *Heaven and Earth Magic.* Just as Smith much later was intrigued by the idea of the Exquisite Corpse, Buñuel and Dali attempted to devise a kind of automatic editing akin to Breton's notion of automatic writing. Wherever they detected a conceptually intelligible connection between shots, they broke the splice and recombined their materials until what resulted struck them as arbitrary. In place of normal narrative connections, they arrived at dreamlike associations, modeled on the psychic prototypes of the structures of the primary processes. For instance, dramatization structures imagery—the underarm hair of a woman migrates to the face of a man, recalling Magritte's painting *La Viol,* where, as well, a pun between the sense of "figure" as both face and body serves as the elementary motive of the imagery.

Buñuel and Dali, like Smith, rely heavily on dream structures. The most famous example of this sort of coordination of condensation and dramatization in *Le Chien Andalou* occurs when a man who has been chasing a woman suddenly picks up a rope and drags two priests and two grand pianos (filled with two dead mules). The whole style of analysis in *The Interpretation of Dreams* is predicated on the supposition that the primary processes express conceptual relations by physical connections. Thus, that the man's lust is repressed by religion and culture is depicted by his literally being restrained by the rope and burdened by the priests and that great symbol of nineteenth-century bourgeois artistic pretensions, the grand piano. That Buñuel and Dali view religion and culture as asinine is expressed by dumping dead asses in the pianos.

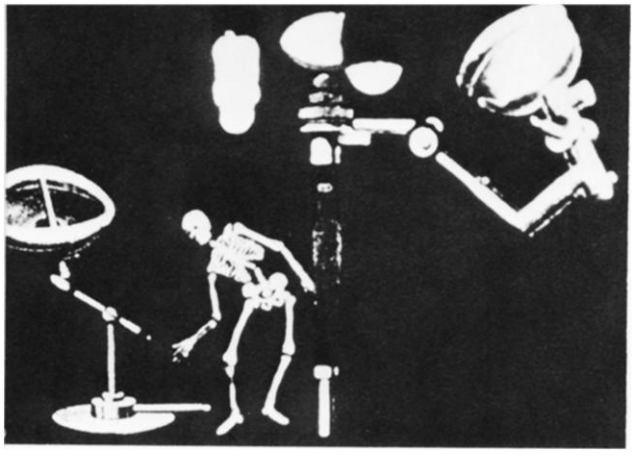
There is a sequence of shots in *Le Chien Andalou* where a shot of ants dissolves into one of an armpit which fades into a sea urchin which fades out into a head. Here, the process of association condenses these disparate elements via superimposition, one of the very metaphors that Freud employs when he refers to Galton's composite photos as a means of describing the mental process of condensation.[18] The surrealist use of transformation as a means of identification, as when buttocks turn into breasts,[19] or when books turn into guns, also occurs in *Heaven and Earth Magic,* where Smith, a self-professed alchemist, makes transformation the major recurring motif of the film. To a large extent, the identifications in both *Le Chien Andalou* and *Heaven and Earth Magic* remain ultimately opaque; it would require long hours of psychoanalysis with the film-makers

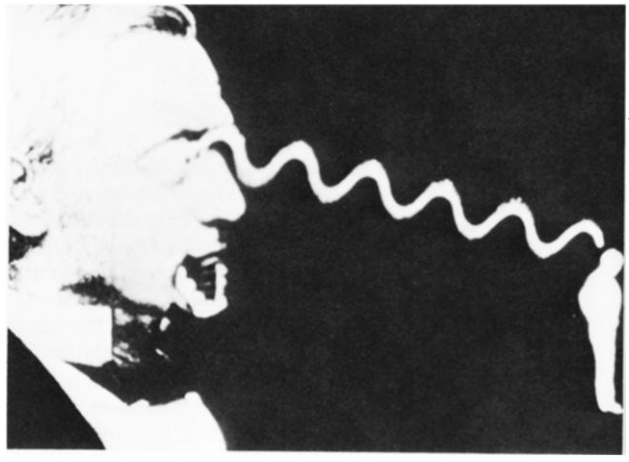


to decode the precise significance of these images. However, that processes of identification are operating can be intuited—one recognizes familiar processes of thought in action. *Le Chien Andalou* abounds with strategies later found in Smith. There is the constant repetition of visual elements —the recurring diagonal stripe design, the image of the nun's habit, and the anaclitic relation between the first man and his tormentor. Here repetition functions as a cue of significance, though the exact signification eludes us. Repetition serves the same function in Smith where various permutations of the same action intimate sense without conveying it. Thus, a woman hits a dog, and the dog hits a woman who hits a bull, etc. Motifs repeat in a way that suggests that they are likely bearers of messages. The viewer is primed by the presence of regularities to suspect significance because some system appears manifest though its messages remain undecoded. The shapes within Smith's images also echo each other—watermelons and eggs, for instance, seem to suggest some psychic equivalence through their visual similarity, recalling Buñuel's anti-sentimental rhyming of a cloud drifting across the moon with a razor slicing an eye.

The surrealist motive behind the display of the expressive mechanisms of the unconscious was to force into public consciousness an acknowledgment of modes of mental experience ignored by a bourgeois culture attentive only to utilitarian and rational processes of thought. Bourgeois culture emphasized only a segment of experience, sweeping under the rug that realm of experience encountered in the incessant play of thought, which constitutes a major part of everyday life. That realm, the Surreal, involves the experience of dream, of reverie, of slips of the tongue, of humor, and of the constant evocation of past memories through association. The strategies of surrealism were predicated on triggering, through artworks modeled on psychic prototypes, a recognition of universally operative but rarely acknowledged dimensions of experience. Here, it was important to emphasize the modes or forms of irrational experience because it was the operation of these modes to which attention had to be drawn. It was the signaling system rather than the particular signals which required recognition. If the signals were clear, the operation of the irrational would be experienced from a rational perspective; the mechanisms of the unconscious would appear as just another foreign language; the qualitative divide between rational and irrational would be co-opted. Attention would be drawn away from the unconscious modes of experience and drawn toward a preoccupation with the assertions of the unconscious, rewritten in the intelligible language of wishes and demands. Thus, it was essential to the surrealist project that its display of the operations of the unconscious remain partly inscrutable. Through the hermeticism of *Heaven and Earth Magic,* Smith engenders this provocative inscrutability, intimating sense through the presence of unconscious expressive processes, thereby making the unconscious manifest, eliciting its recognition by displaying its universal modes in such a way that the audience gasps as a mirror is held up to its repressed mental life. And, as with Buñuel and Dali, that gasp is often accompanied with a burst of involuntary laughter as the boundary line of rationality is transgressed.

Smith read Daniel Paul Schreber's *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness* while working on *Heaven and Earth Magic.*[20] Schreber was an important Austrian justice in the late nineteenth century. He experienced two mental breakdowns which, in his memoirs, he described as visionary experiences. Schreber believed, among other things, that he was being transformed into a woman in order to be impregnated by God. Schreber's memoirs served as the only case study Freud devoted to paranoia, which Freud analyzed as a disavowal of homosexuality.[21] *Heaven and Earth Magic* is not an illustration of Schreber's memoirs; however, certain elements in the film parallel the memoirs. Both involve the construction of a woman. Moreover, given that the primary mental





faculty in the woman's mind, the homunculus, is male, there seems to be a theme of sexual confusion in the film. Were one to identify Smith with the heroine, then one might postulate that Smith is, at least intuitively, miming Schreber's metamorphosis. This hypothesis could be motivated by the fact that it is through Smith's automatism that the film progresses. The constant imagery of dismemberment suggests castration. As well, recalling Schreber's relation to God, the motifs of enemas, the tinkering with innards, and the skeleton's penetration of the watermelon indicate a preoccupation with rape. The significance of these correspondences with Schreber lead one to propose that Smith, perhaps intuitively, is working out a consistent paranoid fantasy of homosexual denial; a syndrome of mental illness is providing a model for the design of the film.

Initially *Heaven and Earth Magic* appears both confused and confusing. Its moments of narrative intelligibility are even rarer than those in *Le Chien Andalou*. Yet the film ultimately reveals a remarkable degree of coherence. The explicit identification of the frame with the mind provides the pretext for further elaboration. The bit-by-bit articulation of imagery as well as the overarching paranoid structure develop in detail the explicit mental metaphor, literalizing empiricist and psychoanalytic theories of the mind, identifying basic structures and techniques of film and of animation with mental processes. Smith presents one with an exemplary instance of aesthetic organicity, the parade of diverse objects reconciled and subsumed through a consistent view of the film as a mind. Smith has a definition of film that is implicit within the film itself. It is a definition that is a function of its use in Smith's cinematic practice.

NOTES

1. P. Adams Sitney, "Harry Smith Interview," *Film Culture*, No. 37, Summer 1965, p. 10. Readers interested in descriptions of Smith's other films should consult the *Film-Makers Cooperative Catalogue*, 3 (1965), pp. 57-58.
2. Sitney, *Visionary Film* (New York: Oxford, 1974), p. 291.
3. Ibid.
4. Errol Harris, *Fundamentals of Philosophy* (New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1969), p. 233.
5. John Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, II, 11, 17.
6. see Coleridge's *Biographia Litteria*.
7. Aron Gurwitsch, "On the Intentionality of Consciousness," *Phenomenology: The Philosophy of Edmund Husserl and its Interpretation*, p. 125.
8. David Hume, *Treatise on Human Nature*, I, 4, 2.
9. Hume, I, 4, 6.
10. E.g., Locke, I,2,4.
11. Hume, I,4,6.
12. Hume, I, 1,3.
13. Sitney, "Interview," 10.
14. Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (New York: Avon, 1965), pp. 327-330.
15. Freud, *On Dreams* (New York: Norton, 1952), p. 50.
16. Eisenstein footnotes Freud in "Word and Image," *Film Sense* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1942), p. 7.
17. Sitney, "Interview," p. 11.
18. Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*, p. 328.
19. This type of association is specifically discussed by Freud.
20. Sitney, *Visionary Film*, p. 292.
21. Freud, "Psychoanalytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia," *Standard Edition, The Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 12 (London: Hogarth Press, 1958).

# Reviews

## WE ALL LOVED EACH OTHER SO MUCH!

**Director: Ettore Scola. Script: Age Scarpelli, Scola. Photography: Claudio Cirillo. Music: Armando Travaioli. Producers: Pio Angeletti and Adriano De Micheli.**

Ettore Scola's *We All Loved Each Other So Much* is a richly textured film which incorporates two notably different but complementary texts. Critical attention (e.g., in reviews accompanying the NY première), however, has focused almost entirely upon the more obvious text of the narrative. The second text, which is embedded in the visual style and reflexive imagery of the film, has been generally ignored. When it has been mentioned at all, it has been as a mere embellishment of the narrative. It is nonetheless in this second text that much of the meaning of the film is to be found.

*We All Loved Each Other* is dedicated to Vittorio De Sica, and there is much in the narrative and the treatment of the characters that is reminiscent of the great Italian director. It portrays the intermittent and fragile relationship of three men who fought together in the resistance, and who are all in love, at one time or another, with a beautiful but unsuccessful actress. Their periodic encounters are followed over a 30-year period (from the end of WW II to the present), as they live their increasingly divergent lives, constantly reencountering each other, sharing memories, and then separating. The shared memories do not constitute a bond strong enough to withstand the erosions of time, or to overcome irreconcilable differences in their characters and aspirations. It is, in brief, an openly structured story of "illusions, hopes, and disappointments"—funny, sad, and humanly moving. The principles are treated in a tender and sympathetic manner, revealing, as Georges Sadoul wrote of De Sica, "the author's inexhaustible love of his characters."

If there were nothing else to the film, this would suffice to make it a fitting tribute. But there *is* much more. Scola's film is, to the most extraordinary degree, a celebration and elucidation, not just of a human reality, but of *how* the cinema represents reality. It forces a heightened consciousness of cinema as cinema. It is this aspect of the film which is embedded in a complex of reflexive references, both visual and verbal, and in the editing and cinematography.

Shots from three well known films appear within the footage of *We All Loved Each Other.* Half a dozen other films are mentioned by name, as are half a dozen directors. Two of these directors and Italy's best known male actor appear as themselves. One of the greatest sequences in film history is jokingly recreated on Rome's Spanish steps. Perhaps more significantly, though, there are innumerable visual references to earlier films. All of this makes of *We All Loved Each Other* one of the most cinematically self-conscious of movies. It is this self-consciousness—this heightened consciousness of the nature and impact of the cinematic image—which constitutes the film's second text.

The initial sequence, shot in color with filtered soft focus, immediately suggests the look of De Sica's last films, beginning with *The Gardens of the Finzi-Contini.* A battered little Fiat comes down the road and stops at the gate of an estate. Three characters (whom we will later know as Antonio, Nicola, and Luciana) get out, check the address, and peer over a wall. A distinguished-looking gentleman in a bathrobe (Vittorio Gassman, later known as Gianni) walks out of the mansion onto a terrace. Then, astonishingly, the same sequence is repeated. The car arrives, its occupants get out and peer over the wall, and the gentleman walks out onto the terrace. Cut to a reaction shot of the three; cut back to the gentleman coming out of the mansion for the third time. He walks down to a swimming pool, sheds his robe, climbs up to a high diving board, collects himself, then takes several steps and springs into the air. He is held there in a freeze-frama shot, and we cut to Nicola who, directing himself to the audience, informs us that this is the ending of a story begun thirty years earlier.

The film thus loses no time in undermining our impression that we are observing photographed reality. It informs us that this is a movie, and that movies have their own unique means of rep-

resenting temporal and spacial reality—that they are based on artifice. It reminds us that we are not observing real characters living their lives, but movie actors playing for the movie audience.

We then cut abruptly to a scene in snowcovered hills. Italian partisans are waiting in ambush for an approaching German convoy. In the thirties or earlier such an abrupt transition would have been impossibly disorienting. It is not for us, however, because *we* know our movies. The grainy, low-contrast, black-and-white photography (suggestive of old newsreels), the seemingly aleatoric composition within the frame, the establishing crane shot, all tell us that we are experiencing the world of early Italian neorealism—the world of partisan activity we remember from Rossellini's *Open City* and *Paisà*. This may not have been the real world, but it is reality as we remember it in the movies, and this cinematic illusion of reality has formed our historic consciousness. The reference here suffices to establish the relationship of Antonio, Gianni, and Nicola. We know from our Rossellini how participation in the resistance creates a bond among men risking their lives together.

This is just the beginning. The cinematic self-consciousness of *We All Loved Each Other* is especially discerible in a screening-symposium of De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves* (and the later TV quiz on the same film), in Nicola's recreation of the Odessa steps sequence from *Potemkin* on Rome's Spanish steps, in a dissolve into color at the very center of the film, in a sequence documenting the shooting of the Trevi Fountain scene from *La Dolce Vita*, and in a movie theater sequence featuring *Of Human Bondage*. These are by no means reflexive gimmicks; each of these sequences functions in a meaningful way in Scola's film.

As we are treated to a well known shot from *The Bicycle Thieves*, Nicola (Stefano Satta Flores) tells us that "this was the golden age of Italian cinema"; and he confesses, "One might say that *The Bicycle Thieves* altered the course of my life." In terms of film consciousness, however, Nicola is before his time. He is the only one present who really *sees* the film and is aware of its cinematic significance. It is subjected to political abuse by a trio of fascists, who ignore the plea of the symposium's chairman to "stick to the film." (How many critics in the period around 1950 stuck to the film?) As he leaves, the chairman comments: "What a crappy symposium, Nicola!" It is indeed: not just because it ends in a debacle, but because of the abysmal lack of cinematic sophistication. Because of the failure to discuss the film in terms of what it does and how it does it.

A decade later, a dissolve from black-and-white to color has ushered in the age of the color film, but the public state of film consciousness has hardly improved. Nicola is on a TV program, answering questions on film history. For the grand prize he must answer questions on *The Bicycle Thieves*. He identifies the child star of the film, Enzo Staiola. He is then shown a famous still of the young waif sitting on a curb. Why, he is asked, does young Enzo "cry with such realism?" Nicola, with typical didacticism, explains that this is a result of De Sica's directorial genius. He had cigarette butts placed in the boy's pockets, and accused him of being a tramp. But no, this is not it. The correct answer, the MC informs Nicola, is "because his father is beaten for stealing a bicycle." Nicola's failure to provide the right answer is confirmed by the judge, assumedly an authority on the matter. For the movie-going audience of the time, the film director was still invisible. The cinematic image was all too often understood as a photographic record of life itself, and not as art—the creation of an artist-director. Nicola declares that he'll appeal the decision to De Sica himself, and that he'll be vindicated. He is indeed vindicated (De Sica publicly recounts the incident of the cigarette butts), but not until another decade has passed, and a greater public awareness of cinematic art has been achieved. (At this later time even Antonio [Nino Manfredi], the anti-intellectual who never went to the theater, knows that *Last Year in Marienbad* is playing at the local movie house.)

This greater state of film awareness was achieved in part by impassioned film critics like Nicola. In the Spanish steps sequence he gives a lecture-demonstration: Eisenstein's brilliant achievement, he emphasizes, was realized "*in the editing*." It was, in other words, the product of a creative cinematic imagination.

We are again reminded that a movie is an ar-

tistic creation in the Trevi Fountain scene. Antonio comes by as preparations for shooting the famous sequence are under way. As the materials and procedures of film production are revealed to us, an illusion—that of Fellini's *La Dolce Vita*—is dispelled. We see Fellini and Mastroianni seated among the production crew, awaiting the moment when they will, respectively, direct and act. We also see the preparation of extras—among them Luciana (Stefania Sandrelli) as an Anita Ekberg stand-in, a camera track built out over the pool, the highly artificial lighting, etc. The end result of such preparations, of course, is the realization of an illusion of reality: for instance the very encounter between Antonio and Luciana which takes place on the side of the pool.

The cinematic self-consciousness of *We All Loved Each Other* is no less obvious in a later sequence, where we find Antonio and Luciana in a movie theater. They have met again, after having gone their separate ways some time earlier. He is seated in the rear with her child, and she stands behind him in her usherette's uniform. They are looking at a scene of mutual confession and revelation played by Kim Novak and Laurence Harvey. The film is the English *Of Human Bondage* of 1964. As they watch, Harvey and Novak address each other as Antonio and Luciana, and express the unvoiced thoughts and feelings of the latter couple.

This cinematic tour de force is an elaboration on a technique borrowed from a production of O'Neill's *Strange Interlude*, which figured in an earlier portion of the movie. This time, however, instead of just borrowing the stage technique, Scola translates it into cinematic terms. The unreal characters in the movie within a movie (Harvey and Novak) express the thoughts of the apparently real characters (Antonio and Luciana) who, we come to understand, are equally unreal characters—the creations of this film which we are watching. But this is not just clever reductionism. How "real," in turn, are we, who sometimes behave in ways reminiscent of Antonio and Luciana?

In addition to the sequences mentioned above, Scola's film is larded with only slightly less obvious citations and allusions to other films. The hospital ward sequences recall *Umberto D.* Images of the porcine, fur-wrapped family of the "Marquis" (Aldo Fabrizi) recall the vulgar rich in *Miracle in Milan.* The sequence in which Gianni, in bed, is turned off by his wife (here sporting the most grotesque dental retainers), recalls a scene of sexual turn-off in *Divorce Italian Style.* (At another point, Charles Foster Kane's "little glass ball with the snow storm in it" finds its way into the wife's hands.) The wife, in a later sequence, sees Monica Vitti in Antonioni's *L'Eclisse.* She takes to hanging empty picture frames on walls, and becomes unable to communicate except by means of a tape recorder. A hilarious sequence in which all the members of Gianni's family wander around, each asking whomever he or she encounters if they haven't seen some other member of the family, recalls, in pastiche, the scene on the deserted island in *L'Avventura.* A sequence of the three comrades arguing in the streets at night reminds one of Fellini's I *Vitelloni.* Etc., etc., etc.

*We All Loved Each Other*, finally, is a film which incorporates both a touching human drama (in the manner of De Sica), and an unusually intelligent cinematic appreciation of the art and nature of film. It is outstanding in this latter regard among movies about the movies. The two texts, while complementing each other, result in an experience which is at the same time emotionally engaging and thought provoking. This may not make Scola's film a masterpiece, but it is a considerable achievement.

—MICHAEL SEITZ

WE ALL LOVED EACH OTHER SO MUCH!

# The Red Poster

**(*L'affiche rouge*) Director: Frank Cassenti. Script: Frank Cassenti and Rene Richon. Photography: Philippe Rousselot.**

*The Red Poster,* winner of the prestigious Jean Vigo prize in 1976, is a deliciously complex film. Directed by 31-year-old Frank Cassenti, who worked as an assistant to Costa-Gavras on *The Confession,* the film offers complex emotions and a welcome plethora of intellectual riches, impenetrable as they may at first appear. Well before the picture ends, you are looking forward to seeing it again.

*The Red Poster* is striking because it is at once politically and aesthetically satisfying. Though it exploits the current movement in all the arts toward increased self-reflection, espistemological self-questioning, and the insistent unmasking of the art work, Cassenti avoids climbing the tempting ivory tower to "bliss out aesthetically." Yet, though he obviously sees himself as a political filmmaker, he feels no need to adhere slavishly to a worn-out "realism" nor to conventional narrative structure to get a message across to the mythical masses. There is something for both formalist and activist in this film.

The movie opens on a black screen. Two disembodied voices begin debating how best to capture, for a play they want to do, the essence and the "reality" of a rag-tag bunch of resistance fighters, mostly leftovers from the Civil War in Spain, who were shot en masse by the Nazis during the Occupation in France. The voices despair of finding out what things were "really like," and the blackout ends when one of them expresses the hope that the dead men will live again through those who are going to play them. During the course of the film, this rather conventional artistic notion will become literally and fascinatingly true.

A long shot of a forlorn line of condemned men filing through the woods suddenly appears. The colors, predominantly yellows and browns, are faded and bleached, and yet at the same time seem quite artificial. The men plod wearily toward the place of execution, under the watchful eyes of their Nazi guards, as the unfleshed voice reads a farewell letter from the leader of the group, Missak Manouchian. The letter is presented straightforwardly because it, unlike memory and even art, as we shall come to understand, is true to the way things were, for it existed then and it exists now. Because it is an actual fragment of past reality, it can be trusted in the present. This opening scene, then, for all we know, is a simple dramatization of the historically verifiable events of 1944.

Just before the firing squad executes its orders, the camera cuts away to two young men, apparently in the present 30 years later, who are questioning a middle-aged dancing teacher about her friends in the group, about "how it was." After each of her responses we cut abruptly to starkly simple credits in a bold, purposeful red on a field of black. These sharp cuts (*not* superimpositions) between credits and the earnest questions of the "playwrights" serve to point up the similarity between the work of these young men and that of the director of the film we are watching. The fact that they are going to try to reconstruct the past (in both the play and the movie), to select and arrange the real events to make an aesthetic object (and invariably include their own subjective responses to the events) will distort to some unavoidable extent what "really" happened. And this is what Cassenti would have us understand: the awesome power of art to modify and manipulate. By continually confusing the two, he shows us how different art really is from life. As spectators, he suggests, we are too readily passive and uncritical and thus easily manipulated. Cassenti spends the rest of the picture brilliantly preventing our accustomed slide into illusion.

The film reminds us that it is important to keep this function of art, or in its more commonly encountered form, "show business" (different only in degree), clearly in mind. Thus, it will steadfastly refuse to turn the story of the resistance fighters into spectacle. Cassenti makes clear that this is precisely what the Nazi propagandists tried to do in constructing their "red poster" ("red is the color that frightens people" sneers one Nazi) to discredit Manouchian and his groups as criminals and low-lifes posing as freedom fighters. A scene early in the film shows the Nazis taking pictures of each prisoner with what looks like a movie camera. At one point, Cassenti even shoots a tight close-up of the lens of the Nazis' camera (and, since we are

THE RED POSTER

unable to see his face—just as we never see Cassenti's face—the cameraman remains chillingly impersonal), further underlining the similarity between what the Nazis are doing and what *he*, Cassenti, is doing, between propaganda and art. The Nazis are careful to eliminate those of Manouchian's band who are native Frenchmen, or women, or youngsters from their "red poster," for a stronger effect. How is this different, Cassenti implicitly asks, from the manipulation of reality which goes into making a film or any work of art? The Nazis, of course, are using the power of the camera to isolate and abstract in order to falsify reality purposely, for political ends, and in this they surely differ from the artist who purports to seek truth. But does this difference in intention affect the ultimate truthfulness to reality of the "honest" work of art?

The Nazis' "artistic" construction of the red poster also comes to be seen as but one representative instance of a global strategy. Thus, Goebbels emerges as a grand puppeteer, a master impresario, the Sol Hurok of the Third Reich. In one particularly macabre scene in the film, Goebbels, surrounded by blackness, explains how his grand scheme all along has been to raise the war to the level of elaborate spectacle. In this brilliantly stylized sequence, the Minister of Propaganda gesticulates wildly, drenched in a heavy gray and black make-up which heightens the artificiality of the entire scene, rendering the master showman into nothing but appearance and image.

Cassenti, therefore, would not have us slip into the alluring embrace of illusion, and refuses to give us the "objectified," dramatized portrait of the past that we crave. His strategy is embodied in the central premise of the film—the actors who are playing the resistance fighters in highly realistic, utterly convincing scenes set in 1944 are the very same as those who are playing them in the present-time play we watch the actors prepare themselves for. Present-day scenes merge imperceptibly with re-enactments of the past, and often it is difficult to tell whether we are in the present of the film or back in 1944. We see the actors prepare their roles, apply their make-up, and then with the most unobtrusive of transitions we are in the midst of another scene from 30 years before. Usually at this point we are tipped off, given some clue as to where we are, by German soldiers, for example, momentarily passing within the camera's field of view. Likewise, we know when we are back in the present when people walk by carrying flats and stage props. But these clues are never offensively obvious.

The film is structured through a series of vignettes; most of the narrative movement that does exist occurs in the fragmentary depiction of past time, for nothing much happens in the present scene. As a matter of fact, the play itself is never

put on, and by the end of the film we realize why—we have just seen it as a movie. (By the same logic, and continuing the analogy, we never see the Nazis' red poster until the final scene of the movie, when both "artworks" are finally completed).

Cassenti was wise not to carry the art/reality theme to its logical conclusion by having his young actors engaged in making a *film* about the Manouchian band. For one thing, this would have unnecessarily cluttered the set with distracting technical equipment (as in Truffaut's *Day for Night,* where the technical clutter is meaningful), and he would not have been able to effect the delicate transitions between past and present that work so well. Treating a play, the director purposely limits himself to essentials and thus makes his point with commendable clarity. Finally, by including another medium (instead of getting trapped in the sterile *regressus ad infinitum* of making a film about making a film, etc.) he is able to suggest the applicability of this theme to all art, in its widest sense.

From the beginning, we are offered a spectrum of art and reality by means of which the director suggests how easily the former can be substituted for the latter. At one point, for example, we see two of the freedom fighters assassinate a particularly hated German general. The entire scene is done very realistically, and there are no purposely alienating effects *within* the scene (as in some of Godard, for example). When they rendezvous afterward, the assassins are told by friends that they are just in time for the performance of a light comedy in the style of the Italian *commedia dell'arte* (a favorite metaphor of other French directors like Renoir and Carné). The trials and tribulations of the French partisan will be treated humorously and of course the Germans will come in for some heavy-handed and well-deserved ridicule. The whole spectacle, the most consciously artificial end of the art-reality spectrum (corresponding, in these terms, with the forced fakery of the Goebbels scenes) is played with just the right amount of amateur bungling to make it convincing. Near the end of the piece, the comedian's stage son brings him a letter from his brother. It turns out to be a farewell letter (like that read to us at the beginning of the film), and as the actor, still in his part, is overtaken by grief reading it aloud, he comes to the edge of the stage, lifts up his stylized mask and finishes reading. Up to this point, we had thought the letter a part of the comedy. Suddenly we realize that his brother was one of those shot by the Nazis as part of the Manouchian band. In fact, as we learned previously in the film, he was shot along with the two men who assassinated the German general earlier in this very scene. The assassins are no longer present, of course. The time overlap is made complete when the camera dollies back to reveal the audience watching this little play within the play, among whom are characters we have come to identify as part of the present-time of the film.

In another scene, we watch a character as makeup is painstakingly applied to his face. At the same time, he is being coached by the mother of the man he is playing and is told that the man was to have bravely said, after finishing a cigarette given him by his German torturer, "I've finished, now go ahead with your work." Another smooth transition and we are in the scene the actor was preparing for. But it is all done so slickly and so realistically, that before we know it we are fully engrossed in the dynamic of the scene between the resistance fighter and the German officer and have totally suspended our disbelief. A few absorbing minutes later, the prisoner kills the cigarette he's been smoking and says "I've finished, now go ahead with your work." The artifice of what we are watching suddenly becomes disturbingly apparent and we realize how easily we have submitted to the artist's will.

Later, near the end, even this slight respect for the individual ontological integrity of both art and reality dissolves when, for example, two characters get up from the banquet being held in the present to commemorate the resistance fighters, to play a 1944 scene. Expressing their love for one another, the sole female member of Manouchian's band and her husband do the entire scene stripped of all props save one: the illusion-destroying actors' clothes rack which contains, among other costumes, several prominently displayed Nazi uniforms. Though the moment is painfully artificial, it works magnificently. Here the past and present, reality and art, merge, but for once, honestly, without perpetrating a distorting, manipulative illusion.

Obviously, a great deal of dramatic control is

needed to play purposely confusing scenes like these, keeping us precariously balanced between uneasy opposites, and the acting throughout the film is uniformly brilliant. Pierre Clementi, Roger Ibanez, and Laszlo Szabo, probably the three best-known members of the cast, manage to keep us believing both halves of Cassenti's equation. The photography of Philippe Rousselot confines itself to the difficult, seamless transitions on which so much of the film's meaning depends, and *within* each shot, is properly subservient to the multi-layered script written by Cassenti and René Richon.

The film does drag a bit on occasion (perhaps unavoidably, given its subject matter), but in spite of the preponderantly intellectual tone, it does manage to involve the audience emotionally. Yet it *is* a film of ideas and is ultimately important for the themes and abstractions it works with, most particularly for its successful reconciliation of the anti-illusionist, aesthetic-distancing techniques of so much "high art" of the last half of the twentieth century and its historical and political subject and theme. It is reassuring to see that it *can* be done.

—Peter Brunette

# Books

## Three Books on FILM AND ANTHROPOLOGY

**Anthropology on Film: A Philosophy of People and Art.** By Robert Edmonds. Dayton, Ohio: Pflaum, 1974.

About half of this slender book is given over to an essay by Edmonds that sets the groundwork for thinking about documentary. The other half details a course in documentary given by Edmonds and includes eight essays written for it by students. Edmonds's introduction is not a history or criticism of documentary, but poses broadly the questions of how to define documentary (the book's title is the short answer), how to tackle the issues of truth, authenticity, and objectivity as well as the other side of the coin, style or personal authorship. In doing this Edmonds does a great deal since other readily available books on the documentary either pass over these issues in even less space, handle them badly, or integrate them into an overall argument from which it is difficult to extract an introductory statement. A 64-page essay cannot probe very deeply but it is ample room to invoke the puzzles and excitements that lie in wait; and it is surely not the least of the book's advantages that it can serve as a starting point for a structural, semiological, or systems theory approach as well as more traditional ones. Edmonds notes, "It is apparent, that truth is not so much a matter of facts, as it is a matter of relationships"—precisely the kind of opening that can support many fruitful lines of development.

**Principles of Visual Anthropology**, Paul Hockings, ed. Chicago: Aldine and The Hague: Mouton, 1975. $24.50, cloth.

This is an invaluable book for anyone concerned with ethnographic film, specifically, or visual anthropology generally. Its contents are drawn mainly from papers given at the International Conference on Visual Anthropology in 1973 and therefore represents current assessment of the field by its most respectable members (which is, of course, a liability as well as asset).

Many of the papers generalize from specific film-making experiences, especially in papers by David MacDougall (whose "Beyond Observational Cinema" is one of the best), Jorge Preloran, Gerald Temaner and Gordon Quinn, Asen Balikci, Stephanie Krebs, and Timothy Asch. Others roam more broadly, including useful histories of ethnographic film by Emile de Brigard and by Jean Rouch, reflections on observational cinema by Colin Young, advocacy of the cultural study of fiction

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films by John H. Weakland, and several papers on the study of proxemics, kinesics, and the uses of videotape and photographs as well as film.

The entire aspect of documentary film-making, especially in its more academic dress, receives slight attention in most film periodicals and documentary film books. Hockings's book provides a starting point for dialogue between film generalists or specialists in other areas and those specialists devoted to ethnographic film. The book's limitations, though, require a counter-book more than a brief mention here since they are far less a fault of the editing or the authors than of the basic, and shared, assumptions of both. There are two glaring absences—Marxism and semiology. (I mean the latter to stand for modern film theory generally.) The placement of the anthropogical endeavor within larger totalizations seems only to occur "out there" while inside these pages, and presumably at their precipitating conference, there is a cozy feeling of an academic discipline sailing ahead under its own power, unheedful of the tides and winds about it. Equally disconcerting are the naive assumptions about film, which for most of these ethnographers remains a window-onto-the-world despite all the qualifications about subjectivity and selection. (There is little attempt to consider the role of conventions and audience expectations: how many documentaries can be proven to be transparent windows for cultural codes strictly on the basis of their internal structure?) Film as a textual system; the image as sign; the patterns of exchange within the film and between film and viewer—these questions have not yet penetrated the neo-Bazinian bog in which ethnographic film theory, such as it is, hides out. This book evokes much of the energy and excitement shared by those involved in visual anthropology; it also, in its omissions and absences, portends even greater excitement when theoretical questions being posed elsewhere make contact with the ethnographic endeavor.

**Ethnographic Film.** By Karl G. Heider. Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1976. $9.95 cloth.

A pioneering book can seldom be all bad. There remain large lacunae in film study and those intrepid writers who are the first to fill them at least provide a necessary and valuable start. Jay Leyda's *Dianying,* Monaco's *The New Wave,* Kracauer's *From Caligari to Hitler*—these books inaugurate debate and further research. If seldom definitive, they are at least catalytic and worth considerable attention on this score alone. Karl Heider's *Ethnographic Film* belongs with them as a pioneering study of one sub-category of documentary film.

That, however, is the kindest thing I can say about a book which in its specifics is an appallingly unsuccessful venture. It exhibits two gross deficiencies: lack of familiarity with recent film theory and criticism, and the absence of a clear statement of the goals, methods, and limitations of contemporary ethnography. Lacking these two structural supports, the body of the book collapses into tautological rubble.

In discussing the attributes of an ethnographic film, Heider asserts that such films are informed by ethnographic understanding (p. 5). This understanding is made manifest in numerous ways, beginning with mastery of "Basic Technical Competence" (exposure, focus, lack of jump cuts). From this level Heider jumps to "Distortions" such as intentional and unintentional distortions of behavior, point of view, narration or commentary, and the need for wholism—whole acts and whole bodies (no close-ups). The basic strategy here seems to be a singling out of those filmic attributes that are most transparent and yield the most adequate access to the pro-filmic event without aesthetic or cinematic distortion. Heider invokes, implicitly, the idea of a neutral film style and explicitly stipulates some of the conventions necessary to achieve it. What Heider seems to lack is even a dim awareness that much recent film thinking has attacked this notion of transparency or neutrality as the site of a particular and not at all neutral ideology. But I am reluctant to dismiss ethnographic film because of Heider's ignorance or failure to refute the claims of this body of work. It may be that study of these films, along with documentary film generally, could bring specificity to charges of tyrannization of the spectator and help clarify levels of ideological operation that sometimes become grossly over-generalized into sweeping attacks on "classic" film styles. Heider's book, however, offers little help in exploring this terrain.

Heider's criteria for "ethnographic understanding" are as problematic as his grasp of film theory. He invokes an ethnographic tradition without ever defining it and then employs it as a standard against which to measure the "ethnographicness" of ethnographic films. (The annoyance of a tautological argument here is endemic to Heider's entire project.) For Heider, ethnography, or anthropology, is a science in which methodological distinctions between Lévi-Strauss, Leach, Malinowsky, Bateson-Mead can pass unmentioned and therefore, presumably, have little significance for ethnographic film. In a stupefying act of faith, Heider proclaims that "scientific goals are phrased in terms of truth," that ethnography seeks truthful and realistic descriptions of cultures (and is, therefore, a science) and that although different ethnographic approaches have different criteria for "truth and realism" (sic) the result is that ethnography "gives us many ways to get at truths and realities" (p. 50). Heider does not attempt to explain how such a catholic and trusting conception of ethnography leads to such a limited and proscriptive range of acceptable "distortions" in ethnographic film.

Flimsy assumptions like these lead Heider into endless tautologies and dogmatic assertions. He tells us that ethnographers are "fairly well agreed on what constitutes illegitimate . . . distortion." (p. 7) and that, for instance, differences in interpretation between himself and Robert Gardner about Dani culture "fall well within the range of acceptable variation." (p. 33). Not only does he fail to say who has decided that such variation is acceptable, he does not consider that they may essentially agree and yet both be wide of the mark (the phenomenon of "reliability" without validity) not does he consider other, independent studies such as Rappoport's *Pigs for the Ancestors* in terms of "acceptable variation."

Examples multiply. A concept of "whole acts" is invoked with no theory behind it but bearing a striking similarity to naive or phenomenological notions of the "event" in narrative. That "events" are a function of the observer's, and the participants', punctuation of experience on one level and of the deep structure at the heart of a code on another is never even considered. Heider simply short-circuits himself at the level of a rudimentary empiricism: if a film "adequately shows an entire act [it] has an adequate amount of information."

A final note. Heider sketches out a brief history of ethnographic film which is valuable for drawing attention to such neglected work as Bateson and Mead's Balinese studies. Unfortunately much is also omitted, such as the work of Pierre Perrault, save for a brief mention of the English (and shortened) version of *Pour la suite du monde;* the entire French-Canadian ethnographic/cinéma-vérité tradition at the National Film Board (Perrault, Carrière, Garceau, Lamothe, Gosselyn and others); the American cinéma-vérité of Wiseman, the Maysles, Leacock-Pennebaker (partially invoked only to be dismissed as not ethnographic). In fact, there is an embarrassing shortage of examples, with Gardner's *Dead Birds* and Heider's own *Dani Sweet Potatoes* and *Dani Houses* being among the most frequently cited films (42 citations for *Dead Birds vs.* 17 for *Nanook* and 7 for *The Feast*). Ethnographic film offers much promise as well as achievement; its book-length study surely deserves a better equipped pioneer than Heider.

—BILL NICHOLS

## WOMEN AND THE CINEMA
## A Critical Anthology

**Edited by Karyn Kay and Gerald Peary. New York: Dutton, 1977. $8.95.**

Karyn Kay and Gerald Peary's critical anthology of writings mainly by women about women and the cinema is an important and useful book. The first of its kind, it contains a broad range of articles concerning women and the cinema, from feminist critiques of films to articles on women in the production system to a small section on feminist film theory. Each section contains a bibliography for further reading in the seven areas into which the anthology is divided, and there is also a general bibliography on women and film.

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At a time when feminist thinking about film represents the most important critical reflection on the cinema as an ideological product, this anthology provides a necessary forum by bringing

together a wide variety of essays representative of feminist criticism. However, because so much varied material is amassed under the general rubric of women and the cinema, the anthology lacks a coherent overall structure and general formulation; thus while it is useful as a background text for courses in feminism and film, it cannot be considered a major contribution to the development of a feminist theory of film and the production of a feminist counter-cinema.

The editors openly admit eclecticism as their organizing principle, wishing to convey a multiplicity of views under the rubric which joins their two major concerns: women and the cinema. The richness and variety of the selection attests to this desire to convey as wide a range as possible of perspectives in feminist film criticism. Because of this, it is a useful grouping of the first works of feminist film criticism that antedate the formulation of feminist film theory (in this country). However, it is necessary to make a distinction between feminist film criticism and theory, in terms of both their functions and their usefulness to the women's movement. Without an understanding of the particularities of each, a kind of impressionistic criticism (even if from a feminist perspective) reinforces the discourse of the dominant ideology and thereby the oppression of women. A theoretical approach must deal with the processes of meaning production in film, the spectator-screen relationship, the analysis of systems of representation, and formal and theoretical concerns. On the other hand, the type of criticism offered by most of the anthology concentrates on role models, or on the analysis of characters as real human beings, or on the description of films from a feminist point of view. They are formulated in terms of an analysis which sees the depiction of women in film as reflecting or contradicting the roles available to women in contemporary society. But this premise fails to take into account sufficiently the complex and mediated way the image of women in film is related to women's social condition. While a certain demystification occurs in the analysis of roles for women in the cinema (positive, not positive), this type of critique simply leads to a satisfaction or dissatisfaction about how women are portrayed. It gives nothing to an understanding of how or why these myths of women function nor what to do to provide an alternative cinema which is truly a feminist cinema.

This weakness is reflected in the most problematic section of the anthology, the *Theory* category. The fragmentation and lack of coherence which characterizes the section is perhaps symptomatic of the problems with articulating feminist film theory in this country, particularly the difficulty in defining the object of theoretical inquiry and lack of sufficient methodological tools. As with all the sections, it is presented without an introductory statement from the editors, in this case, as to what would constitute feminist film theory. Each section woiuld benefit greatly from such a statement (for example, *Feminist Perspectives* ranges from a delightful article by Colette through a perceptive analysis of *Adele H.* to a simplistic description of positive role models without any attempt to make a coherent statement describing what a feminist "perspective" would involve). The editors seem to feel that the selections speak for themselves.

In the theory section E. Ann Kaplan's introduction to her interview with the British Feminists outlines some of the major concerns of these theorists, and should have been expanded to a general introduction of the section. Her excellent article in *Jump Cut* # 12/13 (not even mentioned in the bibliography) which describes and evaluates the British Feminists' position should have been included in this section as an elaboration of some of the ways a feminist *analysis* of film differs from the more descriptive *criticism* which makes up the body of the anthology. Further, Laura Mulvey's intriguing article on visual pleasure is merely presented as an example of the use of psychoanalysis as a methodological tool for a feminist analysis of film without any attempt to situate this kind of work in a more general context. Curiously, Molly Haskell's article on the possibility of a feminine style finds its way into this section, revealing the editors' own lack of clarity about what would constitute a feminist theory of film. The bibliography for this section is most illustrative of the problems in the section. There is no mention of the extremely important work done by the women associated with the British journal *Screen,* particularly in the Film Culture section, of Cook and Johnston's work on Arzner and Tourneur, or of other theo-

retical articles appearing in *Screen.* This kind of work is being continued by *Camera Obscura,* a new journal of feminism and film theory, which is not mentioned either, perhaps because it appeared just after the press date of the anthology.

In addition to the two categories mentioned, there are five other sections. *Actresses* combines excellent pieces by Louise Brooks and Greta Garbo with several descriptive articles about actresses and an interview with Liv Ullmann. *Women in American Production* is extremely interesting, containing intriguing interviews with Arzner and Lupino and important historical information on Alice Guy Blache and Lois Weber. The category of *Experimentalists and Independents* ranges from Germaine Dulac to Joyce Weiland, but in this section another problem of the anthology surfaces. From the bibliography for this section one gets the impression that experimental and avant-garde work is fairly limited when in reality many feminist film-makers have aligned with the avant-garde and considered themselves experimental. To not situate this section within the polemic of radical formalism is to ignore the serious debate about feminist film practice that has been polarized around documentary vs. avant-garde (a little too schematically perhaps). In this section, unfortunately, there is no mention of Rainer or Duras. The section on *Women and Political Films* implies certain conceptions of political film which should have been articulated in an introductory section. Both interviews with Wertmüller and Fonda, and articles which subscribe to the view that feminist political films are about women's struggles are included. These are assumptions that can be seriously challenged. This would have merged the section with the next one, *Polemics.* I wonder about the classification of this section—polemics should be articles involving an actual debate, such as the argument regarding psychoanalysis as an appropriate methodology for the feminist study of film. The positions against this view (Kleinhans, LeSage) are noted in the bibliography for *Theory,* but the positions in favor (Heath, MacCabe, Brewster) are left out. These positions identify a very important critical debate occurring in feminist study of film. Instead, the editors define polemics as essays with an argumentative tone, so that Susan Sontag's brilliant essay on Riefenstahl and fascism is included with a speculative article about Lina Wertmüller's dubious feminism.

E. Ann Kaplan characterizes the whole book when she speaks of the "non-systematic" approach. There are provocative and interesting articles in the anthology, but it is more like a kaleidoscopic view of women and the cinema than a careful and systematic attempt at formulating a feminist approach to the medium. But perhaps the scope of the anthology is its virtue; it is like a sampler of feminist critical perspectives and is a historically necessary first step in introducing the various directions available for feminists interested in film. It is useful because it brings together so much material from diverse sources, and perhaps like the first consciousness-raising groups, it is necessary as a general introduction to feminist thinking about film, but it is certainly not sufficient for understanding women's position in patriarchal ideology nor for developing strategies for what a feminist cinema could be.

—SANDY FLITTERMAN

## THE WAVES AT GENJI'S DOOR
## Japan Through Its Cinema

**By Joan Mellen. New York: Pantheon, 1976. $7.95.**

For newcomers to Japanese cinema and culture, Joan Mellen's new book should prove to be a provocative introduction. But those with extensive backgrounds in Japanese history and culture, especially if they have seen more films than Mellen has, will express reservations about *The Waves At Genji's Door.* This is the first book in English to attempt an analysis of Japanese cinema from a political and particularly feminist perspective. One must be careful to take this commitment into account: Mellen's determination to prove her points leads her to extremes—including the repudiation of Tadao Sato, Japan's most prominent film critic-historian. (The translation of his work cited by Mellen has not yet been taken up for publication and is therefore not generally available for reference.)

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Mellen's basic assumption is that, in life as in film, Japanese society was and remains dominated by a concept of patriarchy, centered in the Emperor system. In order to perpetuate its power, it oppresses women as a class and prevents development of a sense of individual rights by inculcating Confucian obedience and Buddhist resignation. This general thesis is valid, if hardly original. But Mellen insists on the innate superiority of Western values over Japanese values, especially the superiority of the horizontal and contractual relationships (sexual) on which Western society is based over the vertical and permanent relationships (parental) on which Japanese society is based. Furthermore, Mellen's polemic intentions lead her also to distort historical fact: she ignores the basic orientation of Chie Nakane's study, *Japanese Society,* preferring to emphasize a footnoted point on the capacity of men to depend on other men for emotional involvement to the possible exclusion of women; she pushes back the date of the *Onna Daigaku,* a book of instruction for women of the samurai class, from the seventeenth century to the twelfth century with the intent of convincing her audience of the centuries of repression endured by women—a very unrealistic attitude considering the historical facts and the social conditions of the period. She blames the Tokugawa regime (1603-1868) for denying women the right to inherit land—something that was actually done in the thirteenth century as part of the preparations for the first Mongol invasion: since women could not protect the land, they could not inherit it, and the confiscated land was redistributed to provide revenues for warriors in order to increase and secure the nation's military force. Mellen's grasp of such source material is superficial, and results in suspect evaluations of both Japanese society and Japanese films.

Mellen focuses on plot and dialogue in presenting her interpretation of Japanese cinema's reflection of Japanese society, past and present. But even on this level she commits blunders that could be excused as such if she didn't make them the basis of her arguments. Her commitment to exposing the male domination of society leads her to lump men (except for favorite "rebels") together in a single category—oppressor—with the result that she is literally unable to distinguish one from another. Her constant confusion of Masuo for Terumichi prevents an adequate comprehension—let alone interpretation—of Oshima's *The Ceremony,* an allegorical "history of a typical middle-class family." Mellen insists that in Mizoguchi's *Life of Oharu,* except for the brief super-imposition of his face over that of a Buddha, Toshiro Mifune does *not* appear as Katsunosuke, and thereby credits Mizoguchi for his representation of the effect of time on the memory of an old woman as a fine and subtle trick "that life plays on lonely women" remembering lost love (in this case, Katsunosuke) "as a man much more handsome, vital, and energetic than he really was." Though not as glamorous as she would have him (suggesting a talent completely lost on Mellen), Toshiro Mifune does portray Katsunosuke and shares the role with no one else.

Mellen even establishes a curious double standard for men. In her view, Osan, in Mizoguchi's *A Story From Chikamatsu,* by rejecting family and responsibility in favor of true love has "achieved her humanity"—always defined in sexual terms by Mellen—"the highest degree of revolutionary struggle" for a woman in feudal times. But because in *Ugetsu* Genjuro stays in Wakasa's enchanted mansion, he is scorned as a "man who has sacrificed all responsibility for the sake of passion, a lust Mizoguchi parallels with his avarice." Though in Imamura's *Insect Woman* Tomi, as a peasant, is credited with the "greatest potential for independence of spirit and strength of character" because of "greater sexual freedom" and "financial self-sufficiency," Kurosawa's Shino, in *Seven Samurai,* is labelled a "brazen seducer" because of her desperate grasp for life in the face of death: she seduces the youngest of the samurai. He, Inagaki's forty-seven ronin, and the young doctor in *Red Beard,* are attacked because "a relationship with a woman seems rarely to be seen by men as the sustaining one of their lives." But Utamaro, in Mizoguchi's *Utamaro and His Five Women,* is forgiven: "His work is particularly inferior when he is in love. Mizoguchi, like Yeats, believes that the artist or the revolutionary, the truly dedicated person, offers his life as a sacrifice to his vocation. If the artist or innovator is exceptional, his total devotion, commitment, and concentration belong to his work as to a mission."

Mellen's limitations are particularly evident in her analysis of different directors and their treatments of women. Knowing little of the Japanese contexts of the films, Mellen indulges herself not only in unwarranted misrepresentation of some films and their directors, but in effusive and uncritical solidarity with others—most notably with Mizoguchi. His beautiful images and incredibly historically faithful *mise en scène* have blinded Mellen to Mizoguchi's tendencies to sadism to which even Yoshikata Yoda, his screenwriter, has referred (Mizoguchi Retrospective at the PFA in Berkeley). One can hardly excuse Mizoguchi by saying that "society" is responsible for the unrelenting abuse heaped upon the consistently passive women in his films: Kinuyo Tanaka almost acquiescently clings, wilts, and weeps all the way down the social scale in *The Life of Oharu.*

Surprisingly, Mellen's feminist sensibilities remain oblivious to this. "In this, perhaps the finest film ever made in any country about the oppression of women, the director, shunning didactic moralizing, can only echo her pain." Tanaka continued her devotion to Mizoguchi long after his death. Her period film, *Ogin Sama,* shows in every aspect so much of Mizoguchi's influence that it is hard to find anything at all of Tanaka herself. But still, she never gave him as fine a performance as she gave Naruse in *Flowing* as a middle-aged maid watching the futile attempts of a geisha to save her house.

In fact, the role of women in Japanese society is something that Mellen almost wilfully seems not to want to understand. Admittedly it is hard for an American feminist to accept as valid the respect, social recognition, and influence accorded to the Japanese mother. For the Japanese, to be a wife is nothing, to be a mother is everything. This fundamental fact is overlooked by Mellen throughout the book. She repudiates Naruse's *Mother* as "glorifying the role of housewife and 'Mama-san' " (solely the appellation, by the way, of the proprietress of a bar or restaurant) in which he "almost obscenely idealizes the Japanese woman as housewife." Similarly, Mellen underestimates the relationship between Sanjuro and Kurosawa's most memorable lady (Takako Irie), who for Mellen is merely in "late middle age, having long passed the time when she could use her sexuality against men." It doesn't occur to Mellen that their relationship might be that between any man and the one who embodies the ideals of his own code—that between student and teacher, which of course, is a parallel to that between child and parent, a relationship to which Mellen is generally insensitive. Mellen does not recognize the visceral conviction of Japanese society as a whole that children who have to grow up without their mothers suffer permanently—Prince Genji is an early literary example. As a consequence, she attacks Ozu as the propagandist of "feudal obligations" which alone are presumed to compel Takako in *Tokyo Twilight* to return to her husband. She credits Ozu with "psychological perception meeting that of Freud" for his portrayal of Akiko, Takako's sister, as a victim of maternal abandonment, but does not acknowledge that Takako might be willing to return to an unhappy marriage in order to spare her own child what she and her sister have suffered.

Not only basic social values but the historical and philosophical contexts of the films prove to be beyond Mellen's scope. She simply doesn't recognize the nature of the Tokugawa police state: she refuses to admit that it exists in *Night Drum,* Imai's version of Chikamatsu's story of adultery in the samurai class. She simply dismisses the fact of joint legal responsibility and derides the family's fear of expulsion from the fief because of their responsibility for the adulteress's conduct as a "hysteria over the possibility (and it remains only that) that they may have their property confiscated." It seems a little incredible that Mellen makes no connection from one film to the next: in Kobayashi's *Harakiri,* three thousand samurai lost their livelihoods because of the mistake of one director of castle repairs. And in *A Story From Chikamatsu,* Ishun the merchant lost his property not because his wife had committed adultery, but because he had failed to report it to the authorities. In the totalitarian state, there is no action that is left to individual discretion and Mellen's failure to realize this (except when she wants to) prevents a critical evaluation of the film or of the directors' intentions within it.

Because of her unfamiliarity with the somewhat subversive nature of theater during the Tokugawa period, Mellen crudely rejects Inagaki's *Chushin-*

*gura* as chambara—"flamboyant spectacle flawed by visual excesses"—because it is in color and utilizes Kabuki conventions. The story of the Ako ronin is not merely a glorification of revenge and the "choice of feudal brotherhood over heterosexual love" but was the symbol of the age for the Confucian rationale for individual ethical resistance to arbitrary tyranny. Oishi Kuranosuke's insistence on the revenge of his lord was in accordance with the teaching of Yamago Sokō (his teacher) whose codification of bushidō was enough of a challenge to Tokugawa authority to get him exiled to Ako. The Ako ronin—as well as Inagaki's treatment which preserves a sense of the theatrical tradition which enshrined and popularized them—should certainly be granted the deference claimed for Utamaro whose revolutionary activity consisted in painting teahouse maids and prostitutes.

Mellen underestimates both the Japanese and their dramatic traditions: Japanese use of the historical film allowed much more than "a very limited, symbolic illumination of the particular situations faced by Japanese in the twentieth century." Nor is it true that "all political films in Japan were made not only after the Second World War but after the Occupation." Sadao Yamanaka, the great period film-maker of the thirties, was not sent to China to be killed for "limited, symbolic illumination": the Japanese know how to read their own conventions even if Mellen does not.

Inagaki (to whom Mellen attributes Okamoto's *Warring Clans*) is at the bottom of Mellen's list of Japanese directors—with Ozu not too far above him. But even Ozu is more fair to Japanese women than Mellen admits. Thus, in *Early Summer*, it is not Noriko who is resigned because she "finally yields to family pressure and marries a neighboring widower about to take up work in cold, rural Akita." Noriko's poor mother and father, after searching high and low for a suitable match and finding none, sit watching a bridal procession from their country retirement home sadly disappointed but resigned to the fact that Noriko has gone and decided on a husband on her own and without consulting the family. She has not even waited to be married at home. The mother of an only girl should be upset. And it is to her brother's condescending declaration that "men should be kind to women" that Ozu, whom Mellen considers "imperious in conveying how the Japanese woman ought to behave," has Noriko snap back, "No. They should respect each other."

Japanese society may indeed be psychologically, socially, and economically repressive, but Mellen's view cannot be granted credibility on the basis of her evidence: although she discusses some thirty or so directors, she obviously has not seen enough Japanese films to become familiar with their cinematic, narrative, and dramatic conventions or to understand those films on a first viewing. The films chosen for discussion drastically limit the scope of her perception of Japan and too many are distorted to conform to Mellen's over-vehement convictions.

Taking these convictions into consideration, one can resign oneself to her analysis of the angel-demon dichotomy in Kurosawa's *Rashomon*—even though such a dichotomy does not exist in the Japanese tradition since sex is not a sin. One can tolerate her labelling of the still from Mizoguchi's *Genroku Chushingura* "this young girl who commits suicide to prove her sincerity" even though the lady is Oishi's wife, whom, we remember, Oishi sent mercilessly away "with neither explanation nor even an affectionate farewell." But in the end, one runs out of forbearance for Mellen's broad generalizations when she says of Yukiko (Hideko Takamine, always "lonely") in Naruse's *Floating Clouds* that "she offers herself to him sexually, the way Japanese women have always prostrated themselves before unworthy men." After being subjected to an argument based on careless mistakes, distortions of films, and an inadequate grasp of Japanese history and the rudiments of Japanese theater, this undisguised contempt for Japanese women is the last straw by which Mellen forfeits any credibility for a feminist-political evaluation of Japan through its cinema.

—SYBIL THORNTON

## THE SAMURAI FILM

**By Alain Silver. New York: Tantivy-Barnes, 1977. $12.50.**

"Samurai film" is an American term for period films (pre-1868) whose principal common factor is

*gura* as chambara—"flamboyant spectacle flawed by visual excesses"—because it is in color and utilizes Kabuki conventions. The story of the Ako ronin is not merely a glorification of revenge and the "choice of feudal brotherhood over heterosexual love" but was the symbol of the age for the Confucian rationale for individual ethical resistance to arbitrary tyranny. Oishi Kuranosuke's insistence on the revenge of his lord was in accordance with the teaching of Yamago Sokō (his teacher) whose codification of bushidō was enough of a challenge to Tokugawa authority to get him exiled to Ako. The Ako ronin—as well as Inagaki's treatment which preserves a sense of the theatrical tradition which enshrined and popularized them—should certainly be granted the deference claimed for Utamaro whose revolutionary activity consisted in painting teahouse maids and prostitutes.

Mellen underestimates both the Japanese and their dramatic traditions: Japanese use of the historical film allowed much more than "a very limited, symbolic illumination of the particular situations faced by Japanese in the twentieth century." Nor is it true that "all political films in Japan were made not only after the Second World War but after the Occupation." Sadao Yamanaka, the great period film-maker of the thirties, was not sent to China to be killed for "limited, symbolic illumination": the Japanese know how to read their own conventions even if Mellen does not.

Inagaki (to whom Mellen attributes Okamoto's *Warring Clans*) is at the bottom of Mellen's list of Japanese directors—with Ozu not too far above him. But even Ozu is more fair to Japanese women than Mellen admits. Thus, in *Early Summer*, it is not Noriko who is resigned because she "finally yields to family pressure and marries a neighboring widower about to take up work in cold, rural Akita." Noriko's poor mother and father, after searching high and low for a suitable match and finding none, sit watching a bridal procession from their country retirement home sadly disappointed but resigned to the fact that Noriko has gone and decided on a husband on her own and without consulting the family. She has not even waited to be married at home. The mother of an only girl should be upset. And it is to her brother's condescending declaration that "men should be kind to women" that Ozu, whom Mellen considers "imperious in conveying how the Japanese woman ought to behave," has Noriko snap back, "No. They should respect each other."

Japanese society may indeed be psychologically, socially, and economically repressive, but Mellen's view cannot be granted credibility on the basis of her evidence: although she discusses some thirty or so directors, she obviously has not seen enough Japanese films to become familiar with their cinematic, narrative, and dramatic conventions or to understand those films on a first viewing. The films chosen for discussion drastically limit the scope of her perception of Japan and too many are distorted to conform to Mellen's over-vehement convictions.

Taking these convictions into consideration, one can resign oneself to her analysis of the angel-demon dichotomy in Kurosawa's *Rashomon*—even though such a dichotomy does not exist in the Japanese tradition since sex is not a sin. One can tolerate her labelling of the still from Mizoguchi's *Genroku Chushingura* "this young girl who commits suicide to prove her sincerity" even though the lady is Oishi's wife, whom, we remember, Oishi sent mercilessly away "with neither explanation nor even an affectionate farewell." But in the end, one runs out of forbearance for Mellen's broad generalizations when she says of Yukiko (Hideko Takamine, always "lonely") in Naruse's *Floating Clouds* that "she offers herself to him sexually, the way Japanese women have always prostrated themselves before unworthy men." After being subjected to an argument based on careless mistakes, distortions of films, and an inadequate grasp of Japanese history and the rudiments of Japanese theater, this undisguised contempt for Japanese women is the last straw by which Mellen forfeits any credibility for a feminist-political evaluation of Japan through its cinema.

—SYBIL THORNTON

## THE SAMURAI FILM

**By Alain Silver. New York: Tantivy-Barnes, 1977. $12.50.**

"Samurai film" is an American term for period films (pre-1868) whose principal common factor is

sometimes excessive word-play. The Japanese term is *chambara* (onomatopoeic for the sound of clashing of swords): as Silver indicates by his selection of films, this term includes films about samurai (retainers), ronin (unemployed professional soldiers), and even gamblers and gangsters. In *The Samurai Film* Silver discusses the codes and conventions of this genre which, like the western, depends heavily on the iconography of the hero-actor, a certain amount of serialization, and, in particular, the definition of the code of the two-sworded man inside and outside the feudal structure—specifically that of the Tokugawa regime (1603-1867).

Silver is concerned with neither the dramatic function nor with the dramaturgical structure of the films. He underestimates both Kabuki and Noh because they are not realistic; he fails to appreciate their relationship to the period film in terms of their contribution of a dramaturgical structure of resignation, or its modern extension, nihilism. Silver has seen only a limited number of samurai films, mainly those of the sixties and seventies which were the only ones available to him in Los Angeles' "numerous Japanese-language theatres" (so says the blurb). He identifies the period films of the pre-sixties with Mizoguchi's *New Tales of the Taira Clan* and Kinugasa's *Gate of Hell* instead of with other *chambara*—especially those of the thirties on which at least one of the films Silver discusses is directly based: the one-armed one-eyed hero of Gosha's 1966 *Secret of the Urn* is the very same Sazen Tange of Daisuke Ito's 1928 *Ooka's Trial* and 1933 *Sazen Tange.* The physical and functional relationships of *chambara* heroes from the twenties through the seventies are the result of the genre's functional unity which, unfortunately, has been overlooked by Silver. As a result, he fails to realize that there is a set of dramatic conventions related to time and place—or to clan—and that the samurai film especially, like the Japanese film in general, is one of the only political forms of film in the world.

Silver's strength, however, lies in his inadequacies as far as Japanese history and film history are concerned. For he limits himself to genre typing and analysis of a set number of individual films by examining the shots and their relationships to the texts of the films. Although in the end he makes no attempt to consolidate his analyses, they are both perceptive and intelligent in spite of their diffuseness. After classifying the films into several broad categories, Silver does not delineate, but rather observes two thematic patterns from film to film. The first is "that of the outsider stumbling into a pre-existing social turmoil and discovering in it an opportunity to be re-enfranchised." The second is that of the insider who comes to realize the nature of his society and to rebel, however futilely, against it. The hero outside the feudal structure is as often as not "physically or psychologically scarred, ostracized and stigmatized by [his] peers." The hero is constantly frustrated in his attempts to become part of the feudal structure, i.e., get a job: the sword becomes the hero's way up the ladder, but it is used in "autonomous and self-perpetuating" violence, the mechanistic and reflexive "exponent of the post-war samurai film." The hero who is part of the feudal structure (professionally, like Sasahara in *Samurai Rebellion* or ethically, like Tsugumo in *Hara Kiri*) comes to the same realization about his society or even his ethos when his family suffers from feudal oppression. In both cases, the hero comes "to comprehend the dimensions of the social monolith which crushes him." The sword becomes a route for the hero's enlightenment: he rebels against the structure, abandons it, but he never abandons the sword, the basis of his society and the source of his enlightenment. Caught in an ethical trap, the belief in an ethic which oppresses him, the *chambara* hero is "more alienated than any other *genre* hero."

Silver's sometimes elaborate shot analyses indicate the development of a highly original film language by directors who exploit the confines of a closed dramaturgical system to the advantage of the development of that film language and of a political rhetorical system. For the westerner, the films have a perilous tendency to resemble each other: a major problem with films about samurai is that, although on the surface they are easy to follow, a minimum of esoteric knowledge is necessary in order to appreciate the nuances and the full significances of the films.

Silver knows no Japanese, and if one is particular about particulars, little mistakes like Sanadu for Sanada, *ujigama* for *ujigami*, and *ashinaga*

(long-legged) for *ashigaru* (foot-soldier) can be distracting. One gets nervous going through his vocabulary list in which one finds the *go-sanke* (three main Tokugawa cadet houses) turned into *go-sake* (a good cup of rice wine?). Further, the filmography has an awkward layout: half year-by-year, and half alphabetically. Silver has been remarkably undiscriminating about the films he has included. The list includes ghost stories, adaptations of classical plays and contemporary works with a period setting, and samurai porno.

But despite minor drawbacks, *The Samurai Film* is worth at least a passing glance if not more, if only because of the thoroughness of Silver's essays—especially those on Ito's *The Ambitious*, Kobayashi, and Gosha. Silver's style is ponderous, his arguments sometimes diffuse, but a reader willing to dig will find perceptions about individual films that have more significance than Silver realizes. —SYBIL THORNTON

## HOW TO READ A FILM

**By James Monaco. New Yok: Oxford, 1977. Cloth, $15.00; paper, $6.**

*How to Read a Film* is an extraordinarily good introduction to film study; I think it no exaggeration to call it the best book of its kind. Teachers who have been using Gianetti's *Understanding Movies*, MacGowan's *Behind the Screen*, Casebier's *Film Appreciation*, Bobker's *Elements of Film*, or Johnson's *Film: Space, Time, Light, and Sound* ought to give serious consideration to Monaco's text, which is lucid, up to date, comprehensive, and intelligent. It offers two distinct satisfactions, in that it opens up almost all the material one needs to cover in a basic—or at the outset of an advanced—film course, yet continually stimulates the reader to new perceptions. *How to Read a Film* makes an interesting companion volume to Monaco's *The New Wave* (Oxford, 1976); in its politics and in its evidently Structuralist project, it is a guide to film literacy informed by the recent work of Godard and Metz, as contemporary in approach as it is encycopedic in system.

Its chapters are designed to be read in any order, allowing the instructor maximum flexibility in tailoring the text to different course plans; this has the additional benefit of making each chapter, by necessity, a comprehensive argument capable of being worked through at one sitting, like a short book. Stills and diagrams are accompanied by captions that summarize and often extend relevant protions of the text. Typeface, layout, and halftone quality are all of the highest order, ruling out visual fatigue and reinforcing Monaco's clear and engaging prose. The diagrams do justice to complex systems without ever becoming cluttered, and none of the stills is gratuitous. The 42-page glossary of film and media terms is better than anything on the market, and the "Basic library" bibliography is well thought-out.

In addition to all this, the man has a sense of humor. His chapter on film theory, for instance, begins with a runthrough of Mel Brooks's *The Critic* that is neither stuffy nor cute, but leads naturally to a discussion of prescriptive vs. descriptive theory. A three-figure spread in the film history chapter shows "Little Mary" Pickford, Judy Garland's Dorothy, and "Little Mary" Hartman, and makes serious points about the political components of this fantasy image. Throughout the book Monaco's seriousness, his humor, and his evident good nature combine to produce a tone that is rational, pleasant, and convincing. I like his taste, I like his jokes, I like the movies he likes, and my students are finding the book the best they've used.

Monaco's separated chapters reinforce each other in a kind of montage, pushing the reader to discover connections. For example, his presentation of Metz's theories (current to "The Imaginary Signifier") and his overview of general semiotics are not only clear, but also tightly coordinated with discussions in other chapters of the physiology of perception, the political aspects of film codes, etc. He does justice to Eisenstein and Bazin, Godard, and Münsterberg, all the while developing his own consistent perspective, which is basically that of a left-wing Structuralist. Theoretical discussions are reinforced by analyses of classic films and keyed to the major intellectual and economic developments of the century.

The hundred-page chapter on film history, while not a substitute for a full-length text (and I

(long-legged) for *ashigaru* (foot-soldier) can be distracting. One gets nervous going through his vocabulary list in which one finds the *go-sanke* (three main Tokugawa cadet houses) turned into *go-sake* (a good cup of rice wine?). Further, the filmography has an awkward layout: half year-by-year, and half alphabetically. Silver has been remarkably undiscriminating about the films he has included. The list includes ghost stories, adaptations of classical plays and contemporary works with a period setting, and samurai porno.

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Intelligently and authoritatively, Monaco draws on the approaches and achievements of literary study, art history, psychology, systems theory, structural linguistics, economics, and physics. He is as good on Beckett as he is on videodisc. Most film texts have a "Hollywood studio" feel about them, a classy slickness that tends to close the subject; Monaco's feels more like Tanner's *Jonah* or Godard/Gorin's *Tout va bien*—eclectic, dynamic, open. For a book that covers so much, it is remarkably reliable; its occasional errors could (and absolutely should) be corrected between printings. Its political perspective and its commitment to a lucid semiotics make it thoroughly contemporary, engaging, and useful. It is that publisher's cliché, a text that will neither bore the professional nor lose the amateur—but in this case the cliché has aspects of the ideal.

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## LENI RIEFENSTAHL: Fallen Film Goddess

**By Glenn B. Infield. New York: Crowell, 1976. $9.95.**

What is the aim of a book like *Leni Riefenstahl: Fallen Film Goddess?* Perhaps there are two. The profit motive is obvious from the book's cover, with its disingenuous promise to reveal "the intimate and shocking story of Adolf Hitler and Leni Riefenstahl." Disingenuous for, although the book purports to be an historical exposé of a heretofore secret love affair, this sensationalism is only a lure. In fact it is restricted to routine sexual slurs and insinuations around the theme of the sexy, ambitious woman rising to power in a man's world. Infield finally admits on page 160 that all is rumor.

This aspect of the book, its sleaziest, only paves the way for a more important objective—the blacklisting of Riefenstahl. This motive is not at all disguised. The book reads as an attack, and in this, as well as in its distorting rhetoric, it is close to Sontag's "Fascinating Fascism." The book opens and closes with detailed descriptions of protests that prevented Riefenstahl from appearing with her films, mostly at recent international film festivals. There is a long description of the controversy at Telluride in 1974 when she did appear. And although Infield quotes the transcripts from the hearings which officially cleared her of Nazi complicity (her real crime, according to the Allied tribunal, was naiveté, meaning lived belief in the autonomy of the art world [see page 216]), the thrust of the book is that, though Riefenstahl satisfied the courts, "it was not the courts that issued the final decision on Leni Riefenstahl. It was the common citizens of the world who passed sentence." (p. 227) This book implicitly urges them not to reverse that sentence. The all but explicit argument is that to support Riefenstahl is tantamount to supporting Hitler and Nazi genocide.

The text is larded with footnotes, but, for all its veneer of scholarship, the argumentation is inept; very often the documentation contradicts the point being made, or else makes Infield's reading look simplistic. And given the years of controversy over the "facts" of Riefenstahl's career, it is fairly stupefying to read time and again statements which begin "but the truth is . . . " (Still the best place to go for an introduction to these complexities is *Film Culture* 56-57, 1973, which contains interviews, primary documents, and critical appraisals which frequently contradict one another. For a description of the German *Filmwelt* in the thirties see David Stewart Hull's *Film in the Third Reich,* 1969.)

The art and politics question—what is the moral responsibility of the artist?—which is another of Infield's expressed themes, is really just a platform for the question of Riefenstahl's guilt. Was she conscious—the crucial point for Infield—

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of making propaganda films for a genocidal regime? Since he can't prove that she was—the courts ruled otherwise, and he has no new, hard evidence—he argues guilt by association. Given the circles she moved in, she must have realized the implications of what she was doing. But in any case the question is only rhetorical because the tone and shape of the argument (loose as it is) had assumed her guilt from the beginning. Art and politics is a false issue here. The true aim of the book is simply to discredit Riefenstahl in the eyes of a potential audience—and the easiest way, under the present system, is through her sexuality. "Fallen film goddess" sounds too much like a combination of fallen woman and sex goddess. —JANET BERGSTROM

## KLAW AND ERLANGER PRESENT FAMOUS PLAYS IN PICTURES

**By Kemp R. Niver, edited by Bebe Bergsten. (Locare Research Group, 910 N. Fairfax, Los Angeles 90046. $13.95.)**

Niver is one of our precious handful of genuine film historians—that is, a person who works from primary sources. He came to film history by an unusual route, which perhaps accounts for his dedication to extracting facts from the past: a detective and industrial-film cameraman, he was asked to track down some missing paper prints from the Library of Congress, which had disappeared in Los Angeles. He found them, and ended up solving the problem they had been sent to LA for—he devised an adjustable step-printing technology for reproducing the prints on projectable film, thus recovering for film history an enormous amount of material copyrighted between 1894-1912. Since entering his new profession with this resounding bang, Niver and his assistant Bebe Bergsten have produced a whole series of books analyzing the restored films and exploring other historical problems; they include works on Griffith, Pickford, early Biographs, plus his mammoth index to the paper prints collection as a whole. The new volume reveals that K&E produced, in their 1897 passion play film, perhaps the earliest feature-length (5,000') film with a definite story line. The surrounding and following circumstances were bizarre, as was customary in those days. A competing version was quickly shot on New York rooftops, and outflanked K&E at the New York box office. Thomas Edison, hearing that K&E had shot their film in Europe (actually at Höritz), wrote a cease-and-desist letter, based on his holding rights to the Oberammergau passion play. Despite the likelihood of this letter being largely bluff, K&E entered an agreement with Edison; the Edison plant burned down; no prints of the film seem to have endured. K&E lost money on the venture, but as stage theater magnates they later not only began the vertical integration that characterized the US movie industry, but also established the tradition of making films from profitable stage plays. They produced 26 of them in 1913-1914; mostly non-comedies, they remained mainly at a modest three-reel length, but they contributed to establishing the conventions and scope of the feature film. —E.C.

## FILM BEI BRECHT

**By Wolfgang Gersch. Henschelverlag, 104 Berlin, Oranienburger Strasse 6768, 1975. 14 GDR marks.**

The present surge of interest in Bertolt Brecht's film work has materialized in Wolfgang Gersch's new book on Brecht and film. The main points of investigation are the extent of Brecht's contribution to film and his interest in the specificity of the film media. The treatment of these problems involves both factual research and theoretical analysis. Although Gersch does not claim to provide an elaborate theory of film, he is able to match detailed information with a clear understanding of aesthetic questions.

The major part of the book deals with Brecht's contributions to film in the form of scripts, ideas, and directing. The wealth of film material Brecht produced for the silent film in the twenties and later for Hollywood is astonishing; Gersch lists about fifty projects for the Hollywood period alone. Several chapters are devoted to a detailed analysis of the filming of *The Threepenny Opera*—Brecht considered it so severe an infraction of his intentions that he took the film company to court—and to the subsequent collective efforts around the one successful model for Brechtian film, *Kuhle Wampe.* Brecht's difficulties with the directors of the GDR film organization DEFA upon his return to Europe are touched on only briefly.

On the level of aesthetic considerations, Gersch comes to the conclusion that Brecht's influence on current cinema is largely due to his dramatic theories and not to his actual film work. In as far as Brecht's theater was influenced by the early Soviet film makers, his theory emerges as an important connecting link in a major aesthetic development that reaches from Eisenstein and Vertov to Godard and Straub-Huillet.

—ROSWITHA MUELLER-SWOROWSKI

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The major part of the book deals with Brecht's contributions to film in the form of scripts, ideas, and directing. The wealth of film material Brecht produced for the silent film in the twenties and later for Hollywood is astonishing; Gersch lists about fifty projects for the Hollywood period alone. Several chapters are devoted to a detailed analysis of the filming of *The Threepenny Opera*—Brecht considered it so severe an infraction of his intentions that he took the film company to court—and to the subsequent collective efforts around the one successful model for Brechtian film, *Kuhle Wampe.* Brecht's difficulties with the directors of the GDR film organization DEFA upon his return to Europe are touched on only briefly.

On the level of aesthetic considerations, Gersch comes to the conclusion that Brecht's influence on current cinema is largely due to his dramatic theories and not to his actual film work. In as far as Brecht's theater was influenced by the early Soviet film makers, his theory emerges as an important connecting link in a major aesthetic development that reaches from Eisenstein and Vertov to Godard and Straub-Huillet.

—ROSWITHA MUELLER-SWOROWSKI

of making propaganda films for a genocidal regime? Since he can't prove that she was—the courts ruled otherwise, and he has no new, hard evidence—he argues guilt by association. Given the circles she moved in, she must have realized the implications of what she was doing. But in any case the question is only rhetorical because the tone and shape of the argument (loose as it is) had assumed her guilt from the beginning. Art and politics is a false issue here. The true aim of the book is simply to discredit Riefenstahl in the eyes of a potential audience—and the easiest way, under the present system, is through her sexuality. "Fallen film goddess" sounds too much like a combination of fallen woman and sex goddess. —JANET BERGSTROM

## KLAW AND ERLANGER PRESENT FAMOUS PLAYS IN PICTURES

**By Kemp R. Niver, edited by Bebe Bergsten. (Locare Research Group, 910 N. Fairfax, Los Angeles 90046. $13.95.)**

Niver is one of our precious handful of genuine film historians—that is, a person who works from primary sources. He came to film history by an unusual route, which perhaps accounts for his dedication to extracting facts from the past: a detective and industrial-film cameraman, he was asked to track down some missing paper prints from the Library of Congress, which had disappeared in Los Angeles. He found them, and ended up solving the problem they had been sent to LA for—he devised an adjustable step-printing technology for reproducing the prints on projectable film, thus recovering for film history an enormous amount of material copyrighted between 1894-1912. Since entering his new profession with this resounding bang, Niver and his assistant Bebe Bergsten have produced a whole series of books analyzing the restored films and exploring other historical problems; they include works on Griffith, Pickford, early Biographs, plus his mammoth index to the paper prints collection as a whole. The new volume reveals that K&E produced, in their 1897 passion play film, perhaps the earliest feature-length (5,000') film with a definite story line. The surrounding and following circumstances were bizarre, as was customary in those days. A competing version was quickly shot on New York rooftops, and outflanked K&E at the New York box office. Thomas Edison, hearing that K&E had shot their film in Europe (actually at Höritz), wrote a cease-and-desist letter, based on his holding rights to the Oberammergau passion play. Despite the likelihood of this letter being largely bluff, K&E entered an agreement with Edison; the Edison plant burned down; no prints of the film seem to have endured. K&E lost money on the venture, but as stage theater magnates they later not only began the vertical integration that characterized the US movie industry, but also established the tradition of making films from profitable stage plays. They produced 26 of them in 1913-1914; mostly non-comedies, they remained mainly at a modest three-reel length, but they contributed to establishing the conventions and scope of the feature film. —E.C.

## FILM BEI BRECHT

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